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Tragedy and Otherness: Sophocles, Shakespeare, Psychoanalysis

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is all my own work. It neither incorporates work from another degree nor from published material. It has not been previously submitted to another university.

Summary

The thesis is concerned with the relationship between psychoanalysis and tragedy, and the way in which psychoanalysis has structured its theory by reference to models from tragic drama—in particular, those of Sophocles and Shakespeare. It engages with some of the most recent thinking in contemporary French psychoanalysis, most notably the work of Jean Laplanche, so as to interrogate both Freudian metapsychology and the tragic texts in which it claims to identify its prototypes.

Laplanche has ventured an ‘other-centred’ re-reading of the Freudian corpus which seeks to go beyond the tendency of Freud himself, and psychoanalysis more generally, to unify and centralise the human subject in a manner which strays from and occults some of the most radical elements of the psychoanalytic enterprise. The (occulted) specificity of the Freudian discovery, Laplanche proposes, lies in the irreducible otherness of the subject to himself and therefore of the messages by which subjects communicate their desires. I argue that Freud’s recourse to literary models is inextricably bound up with the ‘goings-astray’ in his thinking. Laplanche’s work, I suggest, offers an important perspective from which to consider not only the function which psychoanalysis calls upon them to perform, but also that within them for which Freud and psychoanalysis have remained unable to account.

Taking three tragic dramas which, more or less explicitly, have borne a formative impact on Freud’s thought, and which have often been understood to articulate the emergence of ‘the subject’, I attempt to set alongside Freud’s own readings of them, the argument that each figures not the unifying or centralising but the radical decentring of its principal protagonists and their communicative acts. By close textual analyses of these three works, and by reference to their historical and cultural contexts, the crucial Freudian motif of parricide (real or symbolic) which structures and connects them is shown ultimately to be an inescapable and inescapably paradoxical gesture: one of liberty and autonomy at the cost of self-division, and of a dependence at the cost of a certain autonomy.

The purpose of the thesis is not an attempt to define the essence of the ‘signatories’ Sophocles, Shakespeare or Freud. Nor is it to produce another psychoanalytic or even a ‘Laplanchean’ reading of tragedy in any applied or programmatic manner. It is rather, from a psychoanalytic/Laplanchean perspective, an effort to disclose at the level of these three specific and individual tragedies the decentring and dislocation of subjectivity which Freud continued to foreclose at the level of his own theoretical elaborations.

The thesis is divided into four parts—a general ‘theoretical’ Introduction, followed by three Chapters dealing with each literary text: ‘*Oedipus Tyrannus*: Myth, Tragedy and Reading Other-wise’; ‘*Julius Caesar*: Interpreting (Freud) with Freud and Shakespeare’; and ‘*Hamlet*: Too Much in the Sun’.

Note

All citations from the two main Shakespearean texts, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, are taken from the Arden editions. Short references to other works by Shakespeare are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*. Quotations from Plutarch are referenced in relation to each book (e.g. *Romulus* or *Caesar*), and use of Thomas North's versions is indicated where necessary. Citations from *Oedipus Tyrannus* generally use the Lloyd-Jones translation and presuppose the Greek original reprinted parallel to it. Occasional choices of alternative translations, and my own alterations of Lloyd-Jones's English, are noted in the text.

Introduction

Conjunctions

It would be impossible to list, in strict accordance with a certain academic protocol, all the previous texts that have engaged or sought to engage with the topic that is the focus of this thesis. The relationship between tragic drama and psychoanalytic theory has been variously traced, probed or challenged in a more or less direct manner and to varying degrees, by Armstrong (P.) (2001), Garber (1987), Girard (1977), Goux (1993), Green (1979), Lacoue-Labarthe (1977), Lupton and Reinhardt (1993), Lyotard (1977b and 1989), Rudnytsky (1987), Simon (1988), Vernant (1988) and Winter (1999). Yet this diverse cluster of formidable names, which involves only some of the most recent and the most prominent, opens onto network upon network of others whose range and whose scope would be incalculable. The problem is the essence of the topic itself. That is, the conjunction between tragic drama and psychoanalysis, for better or worse, is one that has always borne at its root the claim to a certain cognateness which would, in advance, implicitly contaminate the critical discourse of each by the other. On the one hand: finding support for its own conceptual apparatus in the exemplars and denominations inherited from, in particular *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Hamlet*, psychoanalysis, as Jean Laplanche has argued, is ‘*originally* at home in its reflections on Sophocles [and] Shakespeare [...]’ (Laplanche 2000A [1992e] p. 221). Tragedy has always been ‘within’ psychoanalytic theory. In part, the latter is a response to it. On the other hand: insofar as classical psychoanalysis positions itself as the answer or solution to the enigmas of those texts, some

of Freud's grander claims, if taken at face value, would suggest that psychoanalysis has always already been at work 'within' tragic drama, just waiting to be decrypted and disinterred. In part, psychoanalysis is characterised, or characterises itself as a continuation and development of tragedy. So forceful has this mutual conjunction proved that on the horizon of any critical engagement with either (psychoanalysis or tragedy) there looms the ineluctable question of both (psychoanalysis and tragedy). Whether or not an individual author ever formulates an overt response to this question, the question still remains, like an imperative whose interpellating demand cannot *not* be heard. Any critical approach to tragic drama 'after Freud' cannot fail to express, or, at the least, implicitly presuppose an attitude to Freud. Nor, by the same token, is it possible critically to approach Freud without taking account of the constitutive role which tragic drama plays in his thought. It is easy enough to begin cataloguing books and papers which deal with the conjunction between psychoanalysis and tragedy; the difficulty would be where to draw the line and terminate the procedure.

A conjunction, however—as we have just termed it—is not necessarily a happy encounter. It can, equally, describe a fraught relation of hostility, a battle between opposed interests (*OED*, sense 2c). More to the point, it can describe what is no real encounter at all, but the illusion which screens an actual *disjunction*, such as the merely apparent or virtual proximity of stars as witnessed by the earthbound astronomer (*OED*, sense 3). There can be no doubt that from the fields of classical and Shakespearean studies alike, some of the most vociferous voices to have emerged with an overt response to the advent and event of psychoanalysis have been of those who labour to repudiate its claims and to affirm its relationship to its favourite tragedies as one of incompatibility or of misleading

appearances. For all that, of course, their texts do not cease to be at once texts ‘on’ psychoanalysis and Freud as much as ‘on’ tragedy and tragedians. But these indigenous defenders against the colonial masters of the psychoanalytic empire have fought (sometimes justifiably and productively, sometimes much less so) to affirm a diremption between psychoanalysis and its privileged literary object—a diremption that would challenge the claim to an intrinsic or cognate relation to tragedy on which psychoanalysis has thrived since its beginnings, a disjunction that would never have been visible from the perspective of the psychoanalysts. The Greek ‘subject’, and especially the one on the Greek stage, is not the Freudian subject; nor is the Shakespearean one. The epistemological field occupied by Freud and his patients is alien to that of fifth-century Athens and early-modern London. Not all of those who rehearse these familiar arguments remain blind to the fact, and to the continuous need patiently to study and investigate it, that the epistemological world which oversaw the birth of psychoanalysis was nonetheless already and complexly burdened with debts to those two precursors. One could cite, in this regard, the two very different books by Jean-Joseph Goux (1993) and Philip Armstrong (2001), concerning Greek and Shakespearean culture respectively. Yet even their efforts to unravel the epistemological heritage of psychoanalysis, and thereby to look afresh at the Freudian and post-Freudian claims made on tragedy, remain anchored to the conviction that an irreducible difference or alterity will always compromise those latter, and mark the apparent conjunction that has determined them as illusory: as misled, seductively misleading and even dangerous.

This is not the place to attempt a detailed critique of the many and varied attacks on psychoanalysis which have been emerging from the classicist and literary establishment

from the start. But, of course, the general project of this dissertation constitutes a broad response to them nonetheless.¹ It is to be emphasised straightaway that this thesis aims to take seriously and to develop in quite specific ways both the claim that tragedy is internal to the fabric of psychoanalysis and that psychoanalysis continues to offer a crucial insight into the enigmas of tragic drama. This, but not in the service of simply defending, reiterating or reaffirming the Freudian reading of the literary texts that are the subject of its individual chapters—whatever the implied unity of the term ‘Freudian’ might suggest (for it will be a crucial supposition throughout that a Freudian reading is never univocal). What I intend to establish in what follows is the function of difference, alterity, disjunction *within specific tragedies themselves*, tragedies to which in one way or another Freud finds himself impelled at certain moments in the itinerary of his thinking. To stick to our convenient term: ‘conjunctions’ already internal to these tragedies individually—that is, the conjunction between a particular text and its mythological, historical or literary antecedents; between one protagonist and another in specific scenes as they happen or as they are reconstructed; and, most significantly and most paradoxically, between a protagonist and himself—these are in advance, decisively problematic. They convey a manifest simplicity, unity or coincidence that is only ever apparent—that conceals, in ways which Freud was not always adequately prepared to recognise, dislocation, division and rupture, as well as the ghostly enigmatic space which fills the resultant breach. The force of this rupture, or, what we will go on to call more precisely, this ‘otherness’ which operates within and at the level of the tragic texts will be mobilised to clarify but also productively

¹ Goux’s text in particular, though, will be crucial, and will be considered in detail in chapter one. (Chapters two and three will, implicitly, continue a critique of his captivating argument.) I have drawn attention to Philip Armstrong’s somewhat hubristic desire to ‘get psychoanalysis out of Shakespeare’ in a short review of his book, (2002).

to challenge and reach beyond both the dominant tendencies of Freud's readings of them and of his own Sophoclean- and Shakespearean-indebted theoretical apparatus. It is the charge of this thesis that the conjunction between psychoanalysis and tragic drama is neither simple nor merely virtual, but is to be located in a mutual, if often muted, attempt to think the complex, the non-simple; to account in different guises for an otherness which would radically compromise the possibility of any simple relation to or conjunction with the other or the self, as such.

In this Introduction I want to unpack the meaning of this charge, and to do so by explicating and justifying the terms which appear in the title of the thesis: What 'otherness'? What psychoanalysis? Which tragedies, and why? Broadly, I wish to do so in the following ways: 1) To consider the historically and theoretically specific moment at which Freud calls upon and claims for the first time to be able to read and understand the two great specimen texts of psychoanalysis, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Hamlet*; 2) To introduce and elaborate, on the basis of that (historical and theoretical) timing, what we might provisionally call the 'methodological' apparatus of the project, namely the work of the psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche; 3) To delimit the principal connecting motif through which Freud and our three tragedies are to be put to work; 4) To outline briefly the argument and procedure of each chapter.

These objectives will be organised into twelve sequential sections.

Freudian drama

Writing about a book by Anton Erhenzweig, *The Psychoanalysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing*, Jean-François Lyotard (1989) argues that in considering the infiltration of Freud's clinical thought by tragic themes,

[w]e must [...] grasp the fact that Freud's belief in or acceptance of the Sophoclean and Shakespearean scenarios [of *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Hamlet*] is first of all a belief in the theatrical space where these scenarios are acted out, the space of theatrical representation, and in the scenography that constitutes and defines this space

(p. 156)

We shall attempt to give some response to this necessity later in the Introduction, though in a way which will not perhaps accord with Lyotard's own demands or beliefs. It must be said, however, that any exhaustive effort to define what drama or the space of theatrical representation 'meant' to Freud would amount to the momentous task of sifting through what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, in his critique of Lyotard's paper, describes as one of the most pervasive metaphorical networks in the Freudian corpus (1977 p. 176).² If, as we will see, even up to Freud's last ever major work, tragic drama has an embodied voice carried especially by Sophocles and Shakespeare, their shared medium of the theatrical stage always had, in the abstract as it were, a singular attraction for him. In this connection one could mention the theatrical simile which structures Freud's account of the transference, or the comparable invocation of ostensibly masochistic spectatorship in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.³ But equally, one would have to take account of the persistence of the figure of the dramatic stage across the shifts and upheavals that punctuate Freud's entire career: even if he and Breuer never once cite Aristotle, the *cathartic* method which they pioneered in

² Lacoue-Labarthe inevitably positions his own and Lyotard's work as stages in this task.

³ Respectively: Freud (1915 [1914]); and (1920) p. 227.

Freud's 'pre-psychoanalytic' days would be only the most obvious of these.⁴ In this section, it is my purpose merely to focus on one moment of punctuation or upheaval in Freud, and to connect it decisively with the first clarified emergence in his thinking of the two principal dramatic texts which have continued to lead a privileged and embodied life in psychoanalytic theory.

Lyotard's paper (and by extension Lacoue-Labarthe's) is indebted to a short essay by Jean Starobinski on Freud's recourse to tragic models (1967), which had originally appeared as a Preface to an edition of Ernest Jones's famous monograph *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949). I will not rehearse Starobinski's argument here; I will merely cite its first two sentences:

Returning from vacation on 21 September 1897, Freud in Vienna wrote a letter to Wilhelm Fliess in which he serenely set forth a negative assessment of his results. He could no longer accept the early seduction hypothesis which had been the basis of his theory of hysteria.

(Starobinski 1967 p. 148)⁵

It is on 15 October of the same year, Starobinski will quickly point out, that Freud wrote again to Fliess, excitedly this time, with the first germs of what would come to be known as the Oedipus complex and with the interpretations of *Oedipus* and *Hamlet* which would take a central position in his later work. The above lines are remarkable, however, for a reason which becomes clear as soon as one reaches the end of Starobinski's essay: nothing is ever made of their import. Starobinski will have proceeded to give what has come to be regarded as a seminal excursion into the career-long treatment Freud gives of Sophocles' and Shakespeare's texts, without ever having said another word on the 'seduction hypothesis'

⁴ Freud and Breuer (1893-5) *passim*.

⁵ Fliess was a Berlin-based ear and throat specialist with whom Freud conducted an intense, even passionate friendship. The main period of their correspondence, of which only Freud's letters remain (Freud 1985 [1887-1904]), lasted from 1887 to 1902.

which he begins by recalling Freud had abandoned. Starobinski invokes it, then abandons it too.

It cannot be argued or, as is perhaps the case with Starobinski, presupposed that the abandonment of the seduction theory prior to the emergence of ‘the Freudian reading’ of these two plays, is a point of merely historic or anecdotal interest. Whatever significance the theatre in general, or these two plays specifically, had always had for Freud, the fact cannot be ignored that *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Hamlet* become as it were readable for him not at one of many possible moments along a straight and already marked out path of research, but at a crucial moment of rupture, of disjunction, when Freud had lost his way.

The seduction theory, or *neurotica* as Freud sometimes called it, will become one of the major preoccupations of this dissertation, and we will elaborate it more fully in the following sections. For now let us only say that it had been an attempt to account for the pathogenic force of the premature and traumatic intrusion of adult sexuality, by an alien agency, into the passive infantile subject. With it, Freud had posited that behind particular scenarios recollected by neurotic and hysterical patients there lay concealed from consciousness the unassimilable remembrance of a real event of infantile sexual abuse. Now, the portion of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) in which Freud first publicly sets forth his interpretative discoveries of October 1897 has been so well-quoted and probed elsewhere as to need no reciting here. Instead, let us turn to one of his great retrospective works, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940 [1938]), his final text in fact, where these discoveries are recalled and, to some extent, replaced in the disjointed theoretical context of their appearance. In considering the role of childhood in the orientation of an individual’s adult life, says Freud in chapter seven,

[o]ur attention is first attracted by the effects of certain influences which do not apply to all children, though they are common enough—such as the sexual abuse of children by adults, their seduction by other children (brothers or sisters) slightly their seniors, and, what we should not expect, their being deeply stirred by seeing or hearing at first hand sexual behaviour between adults (their parents) mostly at a time at which one would not have thought they could either be interested in or understand such impressions, or be capable of remembering them later. [...]

However instructive cases of this kind may be, a still higher degree of interest must attach to the influence of a situation which every child is destined to pass through and which follows inevitably from the factor of the prolonged period during which a child is cared for by other people and lives with his parents. I am thinking of the *Oedipus complex*, so named because its essential substance is to be found in the Greek legend of King Oedipus, which has fortunately been preserved for us by a great dramatist. The Greek hero killed his father and took his mother to wife. [...]

[A]version to [the concept of the Oedipus complex] is so great that people try to silence any mention of the proscribed subject and the most obvious remainders of it are overlooked by a strange intellectual blindness. One may hear it objected that King Oedipus has in fact no connection with the construction made by analysis: the cases are quite different, since Oedipus did not know that it was his father that he killed and his mother that he married. What is overlooked in this is that a distortion of this kind is inevitable if an attempt is made at a poetic handling of the material, and that there is no introduction of extraneous material but only a skilful employment of the factors presented by the theme. The ignorance of Oedipus is a legitimate representation of the unconscious state into which, for adults, the whole experience has fallen; and the coercive power of the oracle, which makes or should make the hero innocent, is a recognition of the inevitability of the fate which has condemned every son to live through the Oedipus complex. Again it was pointed out from psychoanalytic quarters how the riddle of another dramatic hero, Shakespeare's procrastinator, Hamlet, can be solved by reference to the Oedipus complex, since the prince came to grief over the task of punishing someone else for what coincided with the substance of his own Oedipus wish—whereupon the general lack of understanding on the part of the literary world showed how ready is the mass of mankind to hold fast to its infantile repressions.

(pp. 421-7)

Thus: seduction→Oedipus complex→*Oedipus* and *Hamlet*. The entirety of the relevant passages from this last instance of Freud reading Freud covers several pages; elision in the above is necessary and extensive. But of what I have cited, enough is

preserved to indicate a prior ellipsis on the part of Freud himself. It will take us some time to identify it clearly. Nonetheless, let us first of all emphasise that before he invokes Sophocles and Shakespeare, Freud raises the spectre of seduction, even if, in effect, he says nothing specific concerning the seduction *theory* itself. Seduction in its generality is then rapidly superseded by an issue to which is attached 'a higher degree of interest', namely the Oedipus complex, which will occupy him for at least the next seven pages (pp. 422-9). In recapitulating the evolution of his thought Freud thus recalls his understanding of *Oedipus* and *Hamlet* to have emerged within a field of his research that is decisively not that pertaining to seduction. What, precisely, is at stake in this shift from the one to the other? That is the question we are endeavouring to address. But we must be careful to avoid a pitfall into which critics and historians of psychoanalysis have regularly stumbled. Even and especially on the basis of Freud's 1938 retrospective it cannot be supposed that the concept of the Oedipus complex, which enabled Freud's interpretations of the two plays, and which in the above account predominates over the issue of seduction, led on smoothly from Freud's loss of faith in the etiological significance of the latter, or in any way simply succeeded the seduction theory. The rupture or disjunction for which we are attempting to account is more fundamental than any notion of succession or supercession which Freud's own late reconstruction might lead us to assume.

Among recent texts published on Freud's early work, one need not look far to find such assumptions embodied in claims that the Oedipus complex provided Freud with an expedient tool for irresponsibly reducing the truth of, say, parental sexual abuse to nothing more than a universal infantile wish. On this view, Freud is seen to have lost faith in the reality of sexual abuse and to have taken immediate shelter in an appeal to its polar

opposite, fantasy: your father never molested you; you just wanted him to. It is a familiar enough criticism,⁶ and one which has always carried a particular appeal since, as we have stressed, it is in the immediate wake of the abandonment of the seduction theory that Freud makes his first great interpretative recourse to tragic drama, that is, to the imaginary space of literary invention. For Philip Armstrong, for example, it is exactly the perceived swing from reality to fantasy in September 1897 that makes possible the readings of tragedy which appear less than a month later. Opening his discussion of Freud's first appeal to Sophocles and Shakespeare, he claims that

[e]xamining his own childhood memories, Freud 'finds' [in September 1897] that [seduction] scenes are fantasies, produced by the child's desire for one parent and its corresponding jealousy towards the other. Thus the material presented to the analyst by the client—the very stuff of psychoanalysis—whether in the form of memories, fantasies or dreams, will henceforth be read as *fiction*.

(2001 p. 18)

From Armstrong's perspective, the schema which we suggested above, seduction→Oedipus complex→*Oedipus* and *Hamlet*, would translate as reality→fiction→dramatic fiction. Casting away the reality of seduction, he implies, Freud reduces the data provided by the patient to the same epistemological level as imaginative literature.

It is true that in the letter of 21 September, outlining the reasons for having rejected the *neurotica*, Freud remarks to Fliess on 'the certain insight that there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect' (Freud 1985 [1887-1904] p. 264).⁷ We will return to the precise implications of this insight later on. But for now it is necessary to clarify the fact that it

⁶ Such unhelpful assumptions, which Freud's own retrospective works cannot be exonerated from having assisted in generating, have been most strongly set forth in connection with the so-called 'memory wars'. The most notorious instance of many such attacks on Freud's 'failure of courage' over the truth of child sex abuse

does not amount to a self-authorised licence merely to promote the realm of fiction or fantasy at a commensurate cost to the category of reality. Freud goes on in the letter to propose two quite different responses to his finding. Firstly, he suggests that scenes recounted by patients as childhood memories might be adult fantasies projected back onto childhood. This is a position which he will never take up exhaustively, and will later expend a great deal of energy refuting in the work of others.⁸ Secondly, and more importantly, he says that with the abandonment of the *neurotica* ‘the factor of hereditary disposition regains a sphere of influence from which I had made it my task to dislodge it’ (1985 [1887-1904]p. 265). It is in relation to this factor that the path taken by Freud after the abandonment of the seduction theory is to be situated. Arguably, as we will see, so too is one of the most dominant and problematic threads in the fabric of Freud’s entire corpus. If in 1897 he ceases to accept the reality of the scenes presented to him by his patients, he does not just re-approach them as ungrounded fantasies or fictions *per se*: he rather seeks the more fundamental reality on which he believes they are based. By extension, it is to be underlined that he does not turn to dramatic fiction having given up on simple factual reality and sought refuge in the imaginative realm of pure fantasy: his great interpretative turn towards tragic drama corresponds to and coincides with this effort to identify a reality elsewhere.

Here are Freud’s first words to Fliess on *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*:

A single idea of general value dawned on me. I have found, in my own case too, [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood

was perpetrated by Masson (1984). (The paradox should be added, though, that it is thanks to Masson that we have a complete English translation of Freud’s letters to Fliess.)

⁷ As to Freud’s other reasons, I reproduce the full text of this crucial letter as an Appendix.

⁸ It amounts to what will become the Jungian theory of retrospective fantasies [*Zurückphantasien*]. Freud’s most extended attack upon it can be found in the Wolf Man case history (1918 [1914]).

[...] If this is so we can understand the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex*, in spite of all the objections that reason raises against the presupposition of fate [...] [T]he Greek legend seizes upon a compulsion which everyone recognises because he senses its existence within himself. Everyone in the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy [...]

Fleetingly, the thought passed through my head that the same thing might be at the bottom of *Hamlet* as well [...] How does [Hamlet] explain his irresolution in avenging his father by the murder of his uncle [...] How better than through the torment he suffers from the obscure memory that he himself had contemplated the same deed against his father out of passion for his mother [...]?

(1985 [1887-1904] p. 272)⁹

Yes, the advent of what will come to be known as the Oedipus complex is announced within less than a month of 21 September, and yes, it is articulated with and by an interpretative reference to the two tragedies, which will remain basically unaltered until the end of Freud's career. But the 'Oedipus complex', named as such, will not appear in Freud's published work until 1910.¹⁰ It is never once mentioned in his foundational *Three Essays in the Theory of Sexuality* (1905b).¹¹ Nor is it one year later in his discussion of his 'Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses'. Instead, the latter paper stresses the privileged etiological role of inherited or congenital details:

Accidental influences derived from childhood having [...] receded into the background, the factors of constitution and heredity necessarily gained the upper hand [...] but there was this difference between my views and those prevailing in other quarters, that on my theory the 'sexual constitution' took the place of a 'general neuropathic disposition'

(Freud 1906 [1905] pp. 275-6)

From October 1897 the Oedipus complex is 'there', its discovery has been made; but it leads a marginal existence for thirteen years, unassimilated into any significant theoretical context. What, as Freud puts it, gains the upper hand after the seduction theory, is the

⁹ The interpolation in square brackets is provided by the editor of the correspondence. The elisions are my own.

¹⁰ Freud (1910b).

¹¹ A single point invoking the Oedipus complex is appended in a footnote which is added to the text in 1920.

investigation of sexuality and psychopathological illness which is firmly grounded in the hereditary, constitutional and biological reality of the human subject. First and foremost in this regard are the well-known oral, anal and phallic ‘stages’ of libidinal development, set forth in the *Three Essays*. It must be added as well that beyond 1910, once the Oedipus complex has been formalised, the notion of the traumatic event will reappear in Freud, but only to be annexed to this new and dominant essentialism. His account of the typical or ‘primal’ fantasies (of seduction, castration and parental coitus) will come to be grounded in the pseudo-science of phylogenesis and the notorious claim that the violent events of the primal horde are the unconscious and transindividual mnemic inheritance of the entire species.¹²

Recounting the significance of seduction, and then the ‘more important’ factor of the Oedipus complex, what Freud’s 1938 retrospective does not explicitly disclose is the broader and deeper shift which took place in 1897, and which, at first, left the Oedipus complex in abeyance. Somewhat schematically for now, we can say that this more fundamental, tectonic movement consisted in the following. Before September 1897 Freud had been endeavouring to conceptualise *the traumatic introduction of sexuality into the subject from the outside*: that is, by the contingent external agency of a typically perverse, adult other. With the abandonment of the seduction theory, his attention turns to a sexuality conceived in terms of wholly endogenous pressure: that is, *sexuality is seen to emerge from an origin already and constitutively internal to the subject himself*, be it based upon general human biology or upon specific biological and genetic inheritances.

By insisting on this deep shift in the direction of Freud’s thought, we are not attempting to detach the Oedipus complex from his appeal to the tragedies, nor to reduce

¹² See Freud (1916-7 [1915-7]) pp. 417-8. We will be returning to the primal horde later.

the significance of the discovery of Oedipal loves and their corresponding jealousies for his interpretations of them. We are, however, emphasising that the Oedipus complex and the readings of *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*—profound discoveries in their own right—emerge on the very cusp of this broader movement. It is not my purpose to show in any direct detail how the Oedipus complex, once it does become fully formulated in Freud's published material, often risks being annexed to the theories of the subject's constitutional sexual foundation. But it is crucial to recognise that, from the outset, the tendency which propels those latter theories already contaminates Freud's Oedipal readings of tragedy. Note that, discussing *Oedipus* in the letter of 15 October, Freud invokes in passing 'the objections that reason raises against the presuppositions of fate'. In response, he appeals to the gripping power of the play upon its audience, which he says must be a result of their *all* having experienced the desire to do as Oedipus does. Such desire is 'a universal event'. Oedipal sexuality, from the moment of its theoretical inception, is conceived as being outside the sphere of contingency, and firmly located in necessity. It is programmed, no less than Oedipus' inadvertent transgressions are decreed in advance by fate. In the 1938 text we cited earlier, Freud makes the same point, this time directly construing the presence of fate as a necessary poetic distortion of the scandalous Oedipal theme: 'the coercive power of the oracle', he says 'which makes [...] the hero innocent, is a recognition [on the part of Sophocles] of the inevitability of the fate which has condemned every son to live through the Oedipus complex'. Not only does the content of Sophocles' Oedipus story illustrate the objects of Oedipal desire and hatred; its deterministic unfolding dramatises the non-contingency of the Oedipal phase in every subject. As a final reference, I point to an analogous passage from an earlier retrospective, Freud's *Autobiographical Study*:

The poet's choice, or his invention, of such a terrible subject seemed puzzling; and so too did the overwhelming effect of its dramatic treatment [...] But all of this became intelligible when one realized that a universal law of mental life had been captured in all its emotional significance. *Fate and the oracle were no more than materializations of an internal necessity* [...].

(1925 [1924] p. 247, emphasis added)

If Freud produces the rudiments of his Oedipal reading of tragedy almost immediately after (and certainly only after) having discarded the seduction theory, then we must remain alert to the more fundamental development on which it remains based. *Oedipus Tyrannus* poetically figures forth the universal necessity which propels each and every human being: it is, on Freud's reading, *internal*; it originates from the inside. Thus in the October letter and in 1938, what matters in *Hamlet* is not *why*, like the Theban, the Dane too should wish to kill his father and unite with his mother (that question is never raised), only the fact that this automatic complex of feelings pertaining to Hamlet has already been usurped by his uncle and acted out 'by proxy'. Freud certainly reads *Oedipus* and *Hamlet* as dramatic fictions, but, crucially, as fictions founded upon a universal human reality which is as unavoidable as fate. Tragic drama enters Freud's thought at the moment at which the latter starts out on the entirely new path that Freud had suggested to Fliess in September, with the emphasis now on a pre-ordained schema of psycho-sexual development.

It is the theoretical suppositions and blind-spots that structure this emphasis which this dissertation seeks to move beyond, in order both to challenge the tendency which 'gains the upper hand' in Freud's work after 1897 and to reconsider the tragic texts from which it takes its interpretative exemplars.

The theory of seduction

The above account of the tectonic movement in Freud's thought during the autumn of 1897 is heavily indebted to a paper by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. 'Fantasme originaire, fantasmes des origines, origine du fantasme', first published in 1964, was translated into English in 1968 as 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality'. In part, the purpose of the paper—whose implications it would not be unreasonable to state that Laplanche has spent the remainder of his solo career unpacking, reworking and developing—was to liberate Freud's early work from the silence in which it had been immured for well over half a century. Re-mobilising it, moreover, the paper sought to question and overturn Freud's later, heavy reliance on biology, constitution and the dubious schema of phylogenesis. In the present section, setting tragic drama aside for a time, I want to outline the theory of seduction in a little more detail, and I will call upon Laplanche and Pontalis's further elaborations in order to do so.¹³ 'Theory of seduction' rather than 'seduction theory': I invoke the genitive in my subtitle, at least, so as to be clear that our principal concern is not with the empirical factuality of sexual abuse in general or in particular, but with the logic and the structure by which Freud attempts to conceptualise the traumatic event.

We have already asserted that the theory of seduction was an attempt to account for the pathogenic force of the premature and traumatic intervention of adult sexuality in the subject's psychical life. Let us unpack this statement. In the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1950 [1895]) Freud proposes that sexual trauma occurs in two stages

¹³ For an elegant and more detailed account of the theory of seduction, and of the Emma case especially, see Laplanche (1970), chapter two.

separated by puberty. At this point he holds to the pre-psychoanalytic assumption of the child's sexual innocence before genital maturation. The first stage, the empirical occurrence of abuse, happens at a period in which the passive infantile subject is somatically and psychologically incapable of assimilating sexual experience. This 'pre-sexual' sexual event is not subject to repression, since it can carry no traumatic meaning as such for the unprepared recipient. At the second stage, after puberty, another event occurs which need not itself have any sexual content, but which reawakens the memory of the first by some associative connection with it. Within the subject, conceived as now having progressed towards sexual maturity, the first scene undergoes repression belatedly because of the endogenous excitation that is thus elicited at a distance.

The best known exemplification of this procedure of deferred repression is the case of Emma. She comes to Freud with a literal agoraphobia: she is subject to a compulsion not to go into shops alone, and attributes this compulsion to a memory from the time she was twelve. She had gone into a shop to buy something, and seen two shop-assistants, one of whom she had found sexually attractive, and both of whom had been laughing at her clothes. Emma had run away in an 'affect of fright' (p. 353). This memory Freud labels 'Scene I'. Analysis reveals an earlier and hitherto unremembered scene, 'Scene II', dating from the time Emma was eight. It consists in two occasions on which she had gone into a small shop. The shopkeeper had grabbed at her genitals through her clothes and grinned. Her conscience now pricked her for having returned and endured the same experience. After the second time she had not returned. Freud proposes that through an associative network (shop assistants, laughing, clothes) the event of the later Scene I had revived the memory of Scene II. The latter, to which Emma claimed no conscious access prior to

analysis, had at this second stage been repressed and wholly substituted in her conscious mind by Scene I. Her pre-pubertal sexual retardation at the time of Scene II had meant that the seduction by the grinning shopkeeper ‘ha[d] only become a trauma by *deferred action* [*Nachträglichkeit*]’ (p. 356).

There are several points to note here. Firstly, in accounting for the intrusion of sexuality into a subject who is (albeit falsely) presumed innocent, we have, in Laplanche and Pontalis’s words, ‘a subject who is pre-subjectal [and] who receives his existence, his sexual existence, from without’ (Laplanche and Pontalis 1964 p. 11). Sexuality, in pathological cases, is seen to break in prematurely from the outside, ‘from *the other*’ (p. 10). But this is only half the story. The seduction theory, secondly, has a specific and complex temporality (the formulation of the two stages) which means that trauma is located neither in Scene II nor Scene I exclusively, but in the interplay between them. With Scene II we have the experience, the event itself, without affect; with Scene I we have traumatic excitation and the defensive action of repression, but without the experience. Thirdly, then, we have a complex spatiality too. The first, external event happens and provokes insufficient unpleasure to motivate any defensive psychological mechanism. As yet unrepressed but also unassimilable, it remains in limbo, a ‘foreign body’ unworked over and isolated.¹⁴ What precipitates defensive action is the unpleasure elicited by the associative reawakening of Scene II by Scene I. More precisely: the origin of this unpleasure is the evoked *recollection* of Scene II. That is, the external event becomes an ‘inner event’: sexuality, initially introduced from the outside, now breaks out fully from

¹⁴ Laplanche and Pontalis readily invoke the term ‘foreign body’ to describe the psychologically unintegrated status of the external event. It is taken from Freud and Breuer’s *Studies on Hysteria*: ‘We presume that psychical trauma—or more precisely the memory of the trauma—acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must be continued to be regarded as an agent that is still at work’ (1893-5 pp. 56-7).

within, taking the ego by surprise and suffering the belated (*nachträglich*) procedure of repression.

This, then, in a necessarily condensed form, is the theory Freud claims to abandon in the letter of 21 September 1897.

Having established this much, let us look in more depth at Jean Laplanche's solo work in order to grasp the significance of the (belated) retrieval of the seduction hypothesis with which he has been engaged for nearly forty years. The following few sections will set out much of the conceptual material and terminology that will be called upon in the three principal chapters of the dissertation.¹⁵

Freud's 'Copernican revolution' and the work of Jean Laplanche

Following his work with Pontalis, and in a gesture which he has been careful to emphasise is merely schematic, Laplanche has nominated the different organising principles which govern Freud's thought before and after the September letter as 'Copernican' and 'Ptolemaic' respectively. The terms are not strictly his own but are suggested by Freud's essay 'A Difficulty in the Path of Psychoanalysis' (1917), in which he famously compares his psychoanalytic discovery to the blow struck by Copernicus to human narcissism. As Copernicus revealed the earth not to be the centre of its universe, so Freud, Freud says, revealed the conscious human subject not to be the centre of his. Man feels himself to be supreme master within his own mind, but psychoanalysis has shown that *'the ego is not master in its own house'* (Freud 1917 p. 143).¹⁶

¹⁵ I have, of course, no intention of trying to condense the entirety of Laplanche's enterprise into the available space. The most comprehensive general introduction, in English, to Laplanche's work is Fletcher (1999).

¹⁶ Freud also cites an intermediate blow between heliocentrism and psychoanalysis: the Darwinian discovery of man's animal descent.

However true this comparison may generally be, the problem with it from Laplanche's perspective is that *in the very process* of decentring the human subject Freud rarely managed not to recentre it. In his paper on 'The Unfinished Copernican Revolution' (1999A [1992f]), Laplanche takes the most illustrative example of this from the same 1917 essay. There, Freud insists that the psychoanalytic postulation of man's heteronomy is founded on its discovery of an otherness, something 'alien' or 'foreign' (i.e. the unconscious) which dislodges the centrality of the ego:

In certain diseases [he says] [...] thoughts emerge suddenly without one knowing where they came from [...] These alien guests even seem to be more powerful than those that are at the ego's command [...] Or else impulses appear which seem like those of a stranger, so that the ego denies them; [...] the ego says to itself: 'This is an illness, a foreign invasion'.

(Freud 1917, p. 141-2)

No sooner has Freud described this decentring foreign presence, however, than he proceeds to reduce its foreignness altogether. 'Psychiatry [in general]', he continues, 'denies that such things mean the intrusion into the mind of evil spirits from without'; and 'psychoanalysis [specifically] sets out to explain these uncanny [*unheimlich*] disorders' (p. 142). It says to the ego:

'Nothing has entered into you from without; a part of the activity of your own mind has been withdrawn from your knowledge and from the command of your will [...] [Y]ou do not recognise it as a derivation of your own rejected instincts [...]

(p. 142)

The decentring of the ego is thus affirmed at the cost of domesticating the intruder, of reducing the alterity of the invading other to another part of the subject which the subject does not recognise as such. For Laplanche it is the conclusion of Freud's *prosopopeia* to the ego which is most telling: "Turn your eyes inward, look into your own depths, learn

first to know yourself” (1999A [1992f] p. 143). In Freud’s invocation of the Delphic imperative ‘Know Thyself’ (a formulation which will recur, and not unproblematically, in and/or in relation to each of the three tragedies we will be addressing) the subject becomes comfortably regrounded once more. Certainly the ego is displaced from its central position, but only to be replaced by the unconscious, the latter now taking on the role of the subject’s innermost core, a self of which his ego denies ownership but which it is the task of psychoanalysis precisely to help him re-assimilate. Nothing has entered into you from the outside: everything that intrudes upon you from an origin which seems so obscure in fact emerges from inside you, *it is you, your-self*.

It is, Laplanche argues, only on a superficial reading that the astronomical revolution inaugurated in the modern era by Copernicus¹⁷ can be limited to an analogous replacement of geocentrism by heliocentrism. Within the latter system, he points out, the apparently fixed position of certain stellar constellations led to the conclusion that they were at a distance from earth incommensurable with the internal distances of the solar system. Copernican heliocentrism, that is, made conceivable the infinity of the universe, and thus *the possibility of the absence of any centre whatsoever* (1999A [1999f] pp. 55ff). As we will witness, it is Laplanche’s charge that the equivalent discovery in Freud—if we are to stick with Freud’s own comparison—was actually established, only to be formally abandoned, before 1897.¹⁸

¹⁷ Laplanche does take pains to recognise the historical precedents to Copernicus’s work. See Laplanche (1999A [1992f]) pp. 53ff.

¹⁸ It should be added that in connection with the possibility of a radical and permanent decentring, Laplanche privileges the name of Copernicus above that of Darwin, since the Darwinian discovery has historically been so easily (if falsely) reclaimed in the interests of human narcissism. That is, the revelation of man’s connection to the chain of evolution has not inhibited him from perceiving himself as its *telos* and crowning glory. See Laplanche (1999A [1992f]) pp. 80-1.

The domesticating gesture which Freud commits upon the alien of the unconscious in 1917 can be ‘endlessly demonstrate[d]’ throughout Freudian thought (Laplanche 1999A [1992f], p. 67). Beyond 1897 it is the Freudian gesture *par excellence*. The claim to a Copernican decentring of the subject ceaselessly gives way to the same Ptolemaic recentring of the subject back upon himself, with the consequence that Freud is habitually drawn towards promulgating endogenous models of psychical development. Laplanche calls these retrograde movements ‘goings-astray’ (*fourvoiements*). We have mentioned already Freud’s recourse to biology and phylogenesis in accounting for sexual and fantasy life. To these attempts to give the subject a quasi-programmatic (‘fated’) grounding, we should add Freud’s late postulation, in his second metapsychological topography, of the innate id. In each case Laplanche sees an attempt to give the subject a ‘foundation’, but one which is already somehow *proper* to the subject, which already *belongs* to him, and leaves the notion of a centred subject ultimately intact. Data presented in an analysis is always reducible to the depths of the subject’s own interior, his self which it is the task of analysis to enable him to know better.

Laplanche has continued to remain dissatisfied with this psychoanalytic Ptolemaism in which ‘[e]verything [comes] from the interior [...], like rabbits or doves from a magic box of tricks’ (1999A [1992a] p. 133). He perceives it to be endemic in the broad community of Freud’s progeny: biologism persisting with the Kleineans, a specific centredness with the ego-psychologists, and the ghost of phylogenesis never having been fully exorcised. For him, sustaining Freud’s Copernican revolution, in all the radicality which it claims for itself, entails a return to the theory of seduction. Not, it must be stressed, to so-called ‘recovered memory therapy’, but to the theoretical and practical possibilities

opened up in Freud's pre-1897 work for holding open the concept of a decentred subject which eventually slipped from his grasp. It will be seen that this return involves a reworking of Freudian categories and Freudian metapsychology, as well as a correlative reconceptualisation of the human subject with respect to two distinct yet inseparable formulations of an irreducible alien- or other-ness.

Interpreting Freud with Freud

Let us quickly establish that Laplanche's rereading of Freud, in its retrieval of concepts that Freud himself claimed to have abandoned, is neither an 'un-Freudian' nor a random or subjectively determined procedure. Everything in Laplanche's work points to the conviction that if we are to take seriously that most Freudian enterprise of disclosing the heteronomy of the subject, then we must be ready to rethink the routes which Freud is not always successfully led to take in the process of disclosure.

As early as 1968, in a paper entitled 'Intépréter [avec] Freud', he outlines the need for a critical approach to Freud which would above all be inspired by the Freudian discovery.¹⁹ That is, a systematic interpretation that would take account of the object of Freud's own interpretative thought. For Laplanche, the Freudian oeuvre, across all its transmutations and upheavals, is impelled by a single theoretical necessity or 'exigency' (*exigence*) that is constitutively linked to the object of its analysis: namely the formation and development of the human subject. The fundamental charge here is that the vicissitudes of Freud's thought are oriented by the vicissitudes of what it is he tries to think. More recently, in the 'Copernican Revolution' essay, Laplanche has formalised this charge in a

¹⁹ The essay is in part conceived as a response to Paul Ricoeur's appropriation or 'reflexive relocation' of the Freudian oeuvre into an overtly extrinsic, philosophical domain. Cf. Ricoeur (1967).

parody of Haeckel's law, which Freud was fond of citing. According to Haeckel, 'ontogenesis repeats phylogenesis': i.e. the development of the individual repeats the development of the species. Laplanche's 'law' runs as follows:²⁰ 'theoretico-genesis reproduces ontogenesis': i.e. the development of the theory of the subject is constrained to follow the path of the subject's development (Laplanche 1999 [1992f] p. 81). On this view, the Ptolemaic recentring which dominates Freud's work after 1897 *is drawn forward by the very narcissism (the Ptolemaism) of the human subject itself*, which Freud claims, after Copernicus, to have sought to wound.

The argument depends on a disjunction in the astronomical-psychological analogy. In astronomical speculation there was a Ptolemaic school, then a Copernican school; the universe itself cannot be said to have been Ptolemaic and then Copernican. In the psychological domain, Freud's Ptolemaic shift after 1897 corresponds to the narcissism of the human subject which 'gains the upper hand', so to speak, after a prior (indeed primary) Copernican situation which the former ceaselessly labours to mask.

Here, then, is the central thesis of Laplanche's enterprise: Freud's abandonment of the theory of seduction connives, at a theoretical level, with the subject's own constitutive need to mask his heteronomy and (what amounts to the same thing) his primary dependence on the intervention of the human other.

Before taking this up we must add a few further remarks by way of clarifying two propositions mentioned earlier. Firstly: it was said that separately labelling Freud's thought (as Copernican and Ptolemaic) on either side of the September letter was to make a distinction that is schematic. However useful the distinction is practically, it is not to be

²⁰ I place 'law' in inverted commas since Laplanche remains wary of any attempt to derive an orthodoxy from Freud's work. See Laplanche (1999A [1992b]) p. 147. The notion of 'law' in 'Laplanche's law' must be

supposed that the official loss of the seduction theory marked an *absolute* break. As to specifics, the question of the traumatic event continues, of course, to preoccupy Freud until the last; and the temporal schema of *Nachträglichkeit* makes several resurgences in other contexts.²¹ More generally, and by a logical extension of Laplanche's interpretative method, if Freud's thought, like its object, conceals or occludes, in its very evolution, the most radical elements of its foundation, that is not to say they disappear altogether. The truly Copernican discovery of human heteronomy persists long after 1897, albeit in a subterranean fashion, moving subtly against the more dominant Ptolemaic grain. Neither the narcissistic human subject, nor the post-1897 Freud can wholly conjure away the ghost of its forgotten origin. Interpreting Freud *with* Freud is not about choosing one Freud over another (early Freud instead of late Freud, Freud the philosopher instead of Freud the biologist...), but putting the dominant tendencies of his thought 'to work', alongside these coextensive, if marginalised, threads.²² This procedure, to make a second clarification, marks the supposition I mentioned near the outset: namely, that a Freudian reading is never univocal. The charge holds for his readings of tragedy as much as for his conceptualisations of subjectivity. Invoking Laplanche's work in order to reconsider three tragedies which bore a special significance for Freud is not an effort to supersede Freud's approach to them, nor an effort to reinstate it mechanically. It is to attempt to grasp (as we have begun to do)

understood as a strategic parody of the Ptolemaism it seeks to overturn.

²¹ See especially Laplanche and Pontalis (1964).

²² 'Putting Freud to work' is a later description of the same interpretative principal mapped out in 1968. See Laplanche (1999A [1992b]) p. 147. On this point, I should add that in the text of the present dissertation when I refer to something 'in Freud' or to 'Freud' as signator of his corpus, it is to be assumed that what is meant is his work *in general*, across all its shifts. Any appeal to particular portions of his work, or to the different organising principles which dominate them will be clearly marked (as for example 'pre-' or 'post-1897 Freud') and always with the understanding that such distinctions are, as Laplanche concedes, somewhat schematic.

the movement in Freud's thought which governs that approach, and (furthermore), 'with Freud', to begin to move beyond it.

What, then, is this radically decentred, Copernican origin, which Freud's thought and its object work homologously to occlude?²³

The general theory of primal seduction: otherness and the enigma

For Laplanche the sexually constitutive function of the external other in Freud's special (pathological) theory of seduction must be recognised in terms of its wholly general relevance: that is, as a fundamental or 'primal' anthropological situation (Laplanche 1987a pp. 89-90). The confrontation of the pre-subjectal subject by verbal and non-verbal gestures which it is ill-equipped to decode just is structural to its interpersonal existence. The relation between the infant²⁴ and the adult world cannot not be asymmetrical. Nothing of the pre-subject's psychological development can be presupposed; adult activity, on the other hand—and this includes its activity in relation to the infant—bears within it a developed psychological complexity (be it normative or perverse). *By definition* the infant is the passive recipient of currents of meaning from the outside, which it lacks the internal resources to assimilate properly.

²³ For the following three sections at least, I will be speaking in the broadest terms of some of the fundamental tenets of Laplanche's enterprise. He often describes the evolution of his own work in terms of a spiral: a series of progressive returns and re-traversals of familiar concepts and problematics. It is in the interests of clarity that, with some exceptions, I refrain from overtly referencing and cross-referencing the various books and papers by Laplanche in and across which these ideas have, in this way, been developed. My two principal resources, however, are his own book-length condensation of his ongoing research (1987a) and the more recent papers collected in Laplanche (1999A).

²⁴ The term should be taken literally: *in-fans* = speechless.

Laplanche calls these centripetal intrusions *enigmatic messages*.²⁵ The specificity of the term ‘enigmatic’ is conceptually vital here. A *riddle* is posed, as a puzzle, with an answer in mind. In Laplanche’s terminology, an *enigma*, which he often ties to the word *Rätsel* in Freud’s German,²⁶ is not consciously posed as something soluble or to be solved at all. The enigmatic message is enigmatic in two corresponding ways, tied, ultimately, to the structural asymmetry of the adult-child relationship. Firstly, and straightforwardly, the adult message, *qua* adult, will always exceed the interpretative capacity of its pre-subjectal addressee. Secondly, however, the adult message, *qua* deriving from a psychically mature other, cannot be assumed *not* to exceed the intentional capacity of its addressor. The enigmatic message, if it is enigmatic to its recipient, is first of all enigmatic to its sender.

The second point here demands explication. In Freud’s special theory of seduction, sexuality comes from without. Desire is firmly on the side of the other, the seducer. Now, long after 1897 Freud remains intellectually sensitive to the gestures of parental nurture which mediate the infant’s relation to its own bodily zones (‘don’t touch yourself there!’ etc...). But the question of the *adult’s* investment in all of this now invariably goes unposed. The desire of the other becomes a closed avenue. Laplanche attempts to reopen it by insisting that the adult’s relation to the child cannot be evacuated of unconscious content. The verbal, physical and behavioural messages with which the other confronts the child, he argues, will *in general* always be compromised by the unconscious desire of the sender.²⁷ On the side of the adult other, the enigma of the enigmatic message bears on

²⁵ This phrase is generally preferable to ‘enigmatic signifier’ with which, strictly speaking, it is synonymous; for it remains difficult, after Lacan’s formulation of the Symbolic, to speak of a signifier without implicitly privileging (or being thought to privilege) verbal communication. Laplanche’s focus with the notion of the enigma is any gesture, whether verbal or not, with which the other confronts the subject.

²⁶ It does only appear as a word in Freud, and lacks the conceptual status to which Laplanche has elevated it.

²⁷ This is, at bottom, a generalisation of Freud’s notion of unconsciously compromised signification—the parapraxis or slip. See Freud (1901) esp. chapters five and six.

everything in the adult's address to the child which is not reducible to its conscious or material content. There are three further points to be made in connection with this.

Firstly: if Freud's tendency after 1897 is to close off or airbrush out the desire of the other, then it is, nonetheless *with* Freud that Laplanche endeavours to reactivate it. The enigma model presupposes an important conceptual distinction that persists legibly in Freud's German, but which has been lost by his translators and many of his Ptolemaic-based adherents. There are, so to speak, two 'others' in Freud: *der Andere* and *das Andere*. The first refers to the concrete other which we have been discussing: the other human being in whose orbit the infant, as infant, is primally and necessarily caught up. The second denotes the impersonal other, the 'other thing', which is to say, the unconscious. With this wholly Freudian distinction, the fundamental rule of the enigma emerges as follows: that the other (*der Andere*) and his message are always other to him-/it-self.

Secondly: it is to be shown how this otherness-to-himself of the other (*der Andere*) generates not just the possibility but the necessity of the production of the other (*das Andere*) in the infant. But let us first recognise that if Laplanche's insistence on the primacy of the other in this formation sounds Lacanian, it is not. For Lacan the (capitalised) Other of the Law is the domain whose structural prohibition inaugurates the constitutive splitting (*Spaltung*) of the subject.²⁸ The metaphysical character of this formulation is visible in the Lacanian aphorism, 'there is no Other of the Other' (*il n'y a pas d'Autre de l'Autre*). It is clear in this (insofar as Lacan is ever clear) that the bearer of the Law, the one who promulgates it, seems to vanish; there is only Law, which—somehow—gets transmitted to the subject. With Laplanche's return to Freud's *der/das Andere* distinction, the emphasis rests firmly upon *the very process of this transmission* and the unconscious compromise

which inhabits the real, concrete other's (with a small 'o') relation to the infant: there is always an other (an unconscious dimension) of the other (mother, father, carer) and of the other's message, be it one of prohibition ('you'll have it chopped off!'...), over-attention or anything else.²⁹

Finally: what is at stake in Laplanche's return to the seduction theory is clearly not an attempt to reassert the reality of traumatic sexual abuse over its refutation by the appeal to fiction or fantasy. With the enigma Laplanche moves beyond the polarised terms that structure the 'recovered'- and 'false'-memory debate in order to assert that even the most everyday procedures of caring for and relating to the infant are not finally reducible to their purely material reality, infiltrated as they are by a traumatic (unassimilable) content.

Primal seduction and primary repression: implantation, translation/metabolisation

It is in relation to a third category, neither reality nor fantasy, but what Laplanche calls the 'category of the message', that the development of the infant's psychical apparatus is inaugurated, that he forms psychically: which is to say, he forms an unconscious.

Whatever his detractors such as Jeffrey Masson believe³⁰ it should be noted that, in theory at least, reality and fantasy are not polar opposites for Freud. The Laplanchean category of the message is the heir to a domain which Freud calls 'psychical reality'. Its existence is broached in *The Interpretation of Dreams* where Freud states his inability to

²⁸ See Lacan (1958).

²⁹ Lacan's aphorism is cited and specifically taken issue with in Laplanche (1987b) pp. 303-4. Its implicit failure to recognise the human agency of the transmission of the Law is, of course, an extension of Freud's own aforementioned omissions post-1897. Laplanche originally trained with Lacan in the 1950's, but has over the years set out his fundamental disagreements with Lacanian psychoanalysis, and his own theoretical displacement of much of its conceptual apparatus. Nonetheless, it is worth remembering that the phrase 'enigmatic signifier', if not its specific Laplanchean conception, is in fact taken from Lacan (1957); see p. 166.

³⁰ See note 6 above.

say '[w]hether we are to attribute reality to unconscious wishes' (1900 p. 782). We can immediately recognise here the discovery told to Fliess in the September letter, that when it comes to the unconscious one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect. Frequently, in Freud the domain of psychical reality will mean little more than psychological or subjective reality: if it feels real to you, it is as good as real for analytic purposes.³¹ But Laplanche attempts to reinvigorate the promise of its earliest formulations.

In order to take stock of this attempt we must first elaborate the central role played by the notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (Strachey's 'deferred action') in Laplanche's return to the seduction theory, and, especially, in his reworking of the concept of primary repression.³² Within psychoanalysis, this German term has elsewhere been appropriated in two polarised (and, for Laplanche, equally unhelpful) ways: one he labels 'determinist', the other, 'hermeneutic'. The determinist model of *Nachträglichkeit* supposes that patient material (say, fantasy) presented in analysis is causally and directly related to and comprehensible in terms of, the factual reality of a past event, which it is the business of analysis to retrieve from the annals of the patient's unconscious. The hermeneutic model supposes that the material which the patient presents *now* as being in relation to his past is only a subjective construction from the present which he has projected back in time. Thus in the one case, the reality of the patient's past governs his orientation in the present; in the other, his present

³¹ See e.g. Freud (1916-7 [1915-7]) p. 415.

³² Laplanche is not the only eminent figure in France to have returned to the temporality of *Nachträglichkeit*. Once again we have Lacan to thank for its having resurfaced at all (1953), although he never attempts to develop it in any systematic way. Jacques Derrida (1967) and Jean-François Lyotard (1988) have both returned to and generalised the concept in different ways which are comparable to Laplanche. While the present dissertation makes some small recourse to the work of both thinkers, it does not presume that their individual approaches to Freud are interchangeable or would fit together like tessera. The debts and differences which inhabit their work on the issue of *Nachträglichkeit* alone would demand a thesis (at least) in themselves.

retroactively governs his past. Laplanche seeks to negotiate a route between these opposed models. Let us return to the question of primary repression.

The formation of the subject's unconscious in relation to the enigma of the other again comes down to a structural, even logical necessity.

Laplanche avers that all mechanisms in the analytic terminology of Freud and beyond—introjection, projection, identification, projective identification, denial—presuppose a subject: *I* introject, *I* project, *I* deny... None of them, strictly speaking, can be considered 'primal'. All of them must be secondary procedures insofar as they are undertaken by the subject in relation to something in the outside world which must *in the very first place* have impinged upon him: I deny this revelation (which has been presented to me); I introject this other person (whom I knew and with whose loss I have been confronted). Each psychical procedure presupposes the prior, centripetal registration of that which is denied, introjected or whatever else. Each operates in the aftermath of that registration. What is primal—that to which the subject responds from the inside—is always that which comes from the outside, from the direction of the other.

The same would have to apply to repression, of course. Thus when Laplanche speaks of 'primary repression' (which is to say, the formation of the unconscious), it is on the understanding that it is the first of the subject's lifelong series of repressions, but that it must nevertheless presuppose the prior, *primal* movement of the other upon which it bears secondarily. From this perspective the postulation of a primordial unconscious (an id) is clearly intolerable. Laplanche sticks rigorously to the notion of a repressed unconscious,

rather than the in-built one, to which other repressions are magnetised, that is the nucleus of Freud's second topography.³³

How, then, does he account for primary repression?

He suggests that for the infant the other's enigmatic messages are at once exciting and baffling. The infant will not know *what* is being signified, only that he is being signified *to*. He is interpellated by an in-flowing current of (unconsciously conflicted) meaningfulness. Laplanche calls this deposit, the delivery of the enigmatic message so to speak, *implantation*. This primal phase is a putting-into-the-inside, from the outside, of something which is unassimilable: in effect, a foreign body. The implanted message provokes the foundational question: *what does the other desire of me? What does the other want?* It demands active work on the part of its passive recipient. The latter must attempt to respond to incoming messages, to interpret them, ill-equipped as he is to do so—(we might even say, precisely *because* he is ill-equipped to understand). What has been put into him by the other (*der Andere*) must be broken down, bound, integrated—in short, made sense of. Thus, as with Freud's special theory of seduction, a two-stage process: a primal inscription by the other of a message that is enigmatic (and first of all to the other himself), and a second phase of reinscription which is the subject's effort to comprehend what has been centripetally deposited within.

It is in the process of this second phase that repression necessarily emerges. In accounting for this, Laplanche wholly rejects Lacan's proposal (1957) that repression amounts to a substitution of signifiers. The infant's attempt interpret the implanted message may be seen in these terms, but for Laplanche *the unconscious itself forms around everything which cannot be successfully integrated by that attempt*. To shore up this

³³ The latter is still to be 'put to work', however. See Laplanche 1999C.

argument, he consistently draws upon one of Freud's earliest theorisations of the unconscious, which appeared in a letter to Fliess: 'A failure of translation', says Freud in December 1896, '—that is what is clinically known as "repression"' (1985 [1887-1904], p. 208). In Laplanche, the work the infant must do with the enigmatic message is a work of *translation* from verbal and non-verbal adult language. But this labour of translation, like translation in the everyday sense, is definitionally imperfect. It entails a remainder, a necessary space of non-translation, which Laplanche calls the *à traduire* (the untranslated or, to-be-translated). The unconscious is born of the residue of the translation of the other's message, of all that remains un-symbolised, unintegrated by the interpellated infant.³⁴ Laplanche will extend this formulation to *all* subsequent repressions.

In this account of primary repression we can perceive the importance of a generalised notion of the temporality of *Nachträglichkeit*, or 'afterwardsness' (*après coup*) as Laplanche renders it: its diphasic schema being transposed into the two moments of implantation and translation, of inscription and reinscription. We can also see why Laplanche is keen to remobilise Freud's use of *das Andere* to describe the unconscious. The latter's genesis is radically, constitutively linked with the external other (*der Andere*). *Das Andere* is itself irreducibly alien, other, since it comes first and foremost—primally—from the intrusion of the other human being. The 'inner event' of its formation is the after-effect (*après coup*) of the external event of enigmatic seduction.

By way of introducing another of Laplanche's terms for the procedures of repression, it is worth making clear that in describing thus the placing within the subject of

³⁴ In making the very un-Lacanian move of situating the unconscious as the un-symbolised, Laplanche remains very much 'with Freud'. Lacan's famous edict about the unconscious being structured as a language is hardly Freudian at all, since, for the latter, the unconscious contains no contradiction, no syntax, and

the unconscious as an ‘internal foreign body’, he is not positing a simple transmission of, say, the parental unconscious to the child. On the contrary. If it is, in part, the compromise of the other’s message by his unconscious that makes it enigmatic, it is the enigmatic result, precisely, which demands active work by the recipient. Alongside translation, Laplanche also invokes the notion of *metabolisation*. As in the digestive process, as much as possible of that which is put inside must be decomposed and recomposed: broken down into its constituent parts and reassembled into a completely different entity. Lacanian formulations, such as ‘the unconscious is the discourse of the Other’, or ‘the child is the symptom of the parents’ miss the profound reshaping, and the remainder produced thereby, which Laplanche attempts to articulate in the adult-child relationship.³⁵ Out of his passivity before the seduction of the other, the child is constrained not simply to receive but (secondarily) actively to do something with (to translate, to metabolise, to decompose and recompose) compromised, implanted signifiers.

Translation/metabolisation: if they are pertinent not only to primary repression but to all subsequent repressions, what do they amount to in concrete terms? In brief and, for now, in relation only to the child, all of the domains of active psychical production can be situated on this level: representation, fantasy, primal fantasy, infantile sexual theories and so on. Indeed, if we are to refuse to rely on the assumption of spontaneous or programmed (i.e. deterministic) sexual development, we should also have to situate the Oedipus complex in this secondary position: not, then, as an ‘internal necessity’, but as one internal response

therefore no ‘language’ whatsoever (except, precisely, as thing-presentations). The Lacanian unconscious in fact sounds rather more like the Freudian pre-conscious.

³⁵ These formulae are cited in Laplanche (1999A [1992b]) p. 160.

(privileged, perhaps, among others) to parental gestures which come in and are received from the outside.³⁶

To return to the ‘third domain’ we mentioned above. ‘Psychical reality’, says Laplanche, ‘is not created by me [i.e. the subject]; it is invasive’ (1999A [1995] p. 193). If the unconscious is generated by and is the repository for the waste-products of metabolism, the *à traduire* of translation, then its contents relate neither to the empirical fact of an event, nor to its sheerly subjective invention. There are events, certainly, and not merely retroactive (‘hermeneutic’) back-projections from the present; but these past events cannot be understood in terms of factual reality alone. If, as Freud says, one cannot, with the unconscious, distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect, it is because it (the unconscious, conceived as an internal foreign body) consists in the failed translations of that which is *originally* not reducible to material reality but nonetheless does not cease to have been an event—namely, the primal exogenous intervention of the other.³⁷

The first person singular

I do not intend to trace Laplanche’s entire allogenic ‘putting to work’ of Freudian metapsychology. But it must be pointed out that the formation of the unconscious by primary repression does not, definitively does not, amount to an *addition* within the subject. There is no subject as such prior to the intervention of the external other and the

³⁶ With regard to the long passage which we cited from Freud’s 1938 *Outline*, note that although Freud separates the issue of seduction from that of the Oedipus complex, he nonetheless remarks that Oedipal desires ‘follow [...] *inevitably* from the factor of the prolonged period during which a child is cared for by other people and lives with his parents’. ‘Inevitably’ is the crucial word here. It is an effort to secure the Oedipus complex in the realm of programmed universality, and to withdraw it from contingency. And yet, the point remains that the Oedipus complex only emerges out of the prolonged relation with the parents. Is it not, then, implicit, even in Freud, that the Oedipus complex is a psychical formation which first requires their intervention?

³⁷ We are to return to psychical reality and the related question of unconscious fantasy in chapter one.

corresponding establishment of the internal other. In this regard, I cite Laplanche's essay, 'Seduction, Persecution, Revelation':

[I]t is important to emphasise that [primary] repression is a correlate of the constitution of the ego, of the entity that says 'I'. We must therefore think of a process that is not in the first person, and perhaps not even in any person. However, any model [...] is necessarily exposed to the risk of being captured by identity-based thought, which is, in the last analysis, a Ptolemaic model.

(1999A [1995] p. 183)

That primary repression should be a correlate of the constitution of the ego—the 'I'—can be demonstrated by insisting upon the generalised notion of *après coup* (*Nachträglichkeit*) mentioned above. Quite simply, if we are not going to rely on the essentialism or Ptolemaism which came to predominate in Freud, we cannot posit an entity that says 'I', and that does the repressing, but that would exist prior to the infant's exposure to external alterity. It is only by virtue of his passive interpellation by the external other that the infant is constrained to respond actively within. The 'I' of 'I translate', or of 'I repress', *is brought about by* this structural constraint to translate (and thus to 'repress'—to fail to translate). The unconscious is not formed as an entity that is supplementary to the ego; disjunctive and at odds as they may be, they are the co-genitive after-effect of a primal intrusion.

The paradox of this, at the level of the human subject, is central to Laplanche's entire enterprise, and will be crucial in the following chapters of the present dissertation. The origin of the subject is 'Copernican': that is, the subject—as subject—forms in, and by virtue of its existence in, the orbit of the external other. Moreover, thanks to the enigmatic relations of that orbit, it forms as a subject by virtue of receiving and producing an internal other. The subject is thus originarily decentred: decentredness is at its origin (the relation to the external other), and is its origin (the subsequent formation of the psychical apparatus,

the remaindered production of the ‘other thing’ within). Yet the production of this ‘other thing’ demands an autonomous ‘I’ who carries out the producing. The ego, the self is established out of the need to translate the message of the external other, and in opposition to everything which that translation fails to symbolise and integrate. That is, only in the moment of radical and originary self-alienation, necessitated by translation and repression, can a self, an ‘I’, be identified, through which the verbs of translation and repression could be conjugated. The Copernican origin of the subject is what makes it necessary for there to be an ‘I’, but also what makes the first person singular a thoroughly inadequate pronoun.

The subject is, in Laplanche’s words, constitutively *ipso-* or *auto-centric*. It forms itself as an autonomous self in the very movement which makes it already im-proper to itself. It becomes its own centre of gravity by sealing off the external other (the establishment of the ego) and sealing in the untranslated/unmetabolised elements of the other’s traumatising message (the internal foreign body of the unconscious). ‘I translate’, ‘I repress’: the otherness which makes these grammatical conjugations possible is utterly effaced in that making-possible. The first person of the ‘I’ is provoked by, and by sealing ‘outside’ of it (‘not-I’), an originary movement which the self-presence and singularity of an ‘I’ seeks to mask.

With regard to ‘Laplanche’s law’, we can perceive afresh that the evolution of Freud’s thought (and, it is Laplanche’s charge, psychoanalytic thought in general) is ipsocentric in a correlative manner. ‘Nothing has entered into you from without’, Freud says to the ego in 1917. From Laplanche’s perspective, this repudiation of the exogenous is exactly what the ego wants to tell itself. The numerous conceptual ‘foundations’ which Freud, after 1897, laid for ontogenesis—biology, constitution, phylogenesis, and thus the

closing off of the other's desire, the unconscious as/or id which is really only the innermost part of you—all of these can be seen to connive at a theoretical level with the subject's own egoic belief in its auto-foundation: its-self as its basis and centre.

If Freud's thought is dominated by Ptolemaism, it is because the object of his thought is constitutively and paradoxically dominated by it too. *The subject centres itself, becomes a subject, in the moment of its radical (Copernican) decentring.*

Stressing this parallel between Freud's thought and its object, and labouring to break from their reciprocal ipsocentrism, Laplanche reworks the famous, and fairly late, Freudian maxim *Wo es war, soll Ich werden* (there where there was id shall the ego come to be), proposing the alternative: *Wo es war, wird (soll? muss?) immer noch Anderes sein.* There where there was id, there will be always and already the other (1999A [1992f] p. 83). In this alternative, *es* (id) could, of course, be replaced by any 'core' foundation of subjectivity which psychoanalytic theory offers, or even, again, by the grammatical first person.³⁸ It is, Laplanche argues, the responsibility of analysis to uphold as *irreducibly* alien the otherness (*der Andere* and *das Andere*) which is the condition of possibility for the 'I' that forms itself by occluding it. The task of the present dissertation will be to endeavour to bear witness to the irreducible alterities which inhabit our (Freud's) three tragedies, and to the specific ways in which they can be shown to resist the exigency of narcissistic closure by which Freud's post-1897 thought becomes contaminated.

Beyond the primal situation: the question of cultural production

It has already been mentioned that the enigma-translation model pertains not just to primary repression but to all subsequent psychical productions and repressions in the life of

the subject. Rather than follow the many general routes by which Laplanche demonstrates this, let us narrow our focus by drawing things back towards the domain of our central concern. What does Laplanche's return to Freud have to contribute to our understanding of cultural production?

We will respond to this under two different, but equally valid, conditional rubrics.

Firstly: it *could* be legitimately stated that nothing in Laplanche's mature writing engages in detail with a work of cultural production.³⁹ Nowhere in his corpus, that is, do we find a psychoanalysis of, say, a literary text, in the 'applied' form that we find, for example, in Freud. His reasons for this are set out in a quite recent paper, 'Transference: its Provocation by the Analyst' (1999A [1992e]), which, along with another, 'Sublimation et/ou inspiration' (1999B), marks his general orientation with regard to cultural production in the most obvious sense of painting, literature, drama etc.

Applied psychoanalysis, which has been vulnerable to critical attack since its inception, is unequivocally rejected by Laplanche. He argues that the schema of application, of applying the 'clinical' to the 'non-clinical', can only be necessary if one presumes that Freud's inaugural gesture of founding the analytic treatment has no antecedents in human history, no correspondences that are already beyond the clinic. Insisting on the importance for Freud's thought of the 'non-clinical', Laplanche designates a kinship between analytic procedure and certain privileged sites 'outside' analysis—the foremost of these being, precisely, cultural production.

This field, he goes on, bears within it—one might even say: as its constituting property—a model of what is, for Laplanche, the most radical strain of the Freudian oeuvre.

³⁸ Which in German is precisely the word for the ego: *Ich*.

For it is *the* site which is situated from the first ‘beyond any adequation of means to a determinate effect’ (1999A [1992e] p. 224). Artistic creation is a cultural ‘message’, which is, by its very essence, enigmatic. The cultural message is addressed to an indeterminate, anonymous and multiple recipient; and its reception by this plural and non-specific body will by definition produce an effect that is not exhaustively determined by its originator:

The recipient’s relation to the [cultural work] is [...] different from the author’s, a partial inversion of it. But [...] the relation is essential, a renewal of the traumatic, stimulating aspect of the childhood enigma
(1999A [1992e], p. 224)

It is important to hear both sides in this; for in a sense, they are one and the same. There is the recipient and the author: the former being stimulated by the message of the latter, interpellated and constrained to respond by interpretation or even (and especially) his own cultural work. And that is the point. Such a model of creative production and creative response proposes that the author himself will in the first place have been the recipient of antecedent cultural messages to which his own is, first, a reaction, or, as Laplanche puts it: ‘a repercussion, which prolongs and echoes the enigmatic messages by which the *Dichter* himself was bombarded’ (1999A [1999e] p. 244). In other words, the site of cultural production is a *re-opening* of the subject’s originary relation to the other. The cultural legacy of any author will always entail the translation or metabolisation of its own heritage. The author’s work is primarily a reshaping, a reworking of the messages which originally interpellated him, be they in the form of particular myths or stories, or more general codes of genre, tradition, anti-tradition and so on. The cultural message arrives replete with its own de- and re-compositions of the messages of the others that precede it (for it is, as much as anything else, a message about and back to them). The stimulating, enigmatic character

³⁹ I am deliberately excluding from this claim any reference to Laplanche’s doctoral thesis on Hölderlin

of cultural production thus has two inseparable bases: on the one hand, the provoking of a response which can be neither exhaustively determined nor authorised by the appeal to a naïve conception of originating intention; on the other, an alterity relating to its own forebears (whose work is governed by the same principle of indeterminate reception) which, strictly speaking, would make the author's signature as inadequate as the first person singular of the ego.

This is not to say that the singularity of an author or his work gets subsumed. The notorious psychoanalytic tendency to efface it (stereotypically, by dragging everything back to the hermeneutic nucleus of parricide and incest) can, of course, be traced to Freud—but again, and precisely, to a Freud who after 1897 had lost what Laplanche sees as the basis for a radical account of the possibility of cultural transmission and individual creative production. Once everything becomes pre-ordained and 'fated' at the level of the subject, one can easily bring to bear a cavalier interpretative determinism on works of culture.⁴⁰ With Laplanche, the emphasis, as ever, *rests* on transmission: interpellation brings about singularity. It is the very burden of an enigmatic heritage which requires creative, individual production, which demands the singular reshaping that will in turn become one constituent of a new and incalculable heritage. Applied or exported psychoanalysis cannot function within a Laplanchean framework. The cultural domain, as a domain in which the necessity of transmission and translation are the visible mainstays of its possibility and endurance, remains 'outside' psychoanalysis only so long as

(1961)—an early text written under the direction of Lacan.

⁴⁰ Even Lacan, when he attempts to counter the Oedipalising strategy of classical and applied psychoanalytic interpretation (1972), remains tied to the notion of the signifier and the Symbolic. In positing the unconscious as the repository of a universal Law, he can be seen to return to a structure that is no less transindividual than Freud's notion of phylogenesis. If the unconscious just is the discourse of the Other, what is there, at the level of the subject, to differentiate your unconscious from mine? one author's from another's? For a critique of

psychoanalysis continues to disavow the category of transmission and the role of the other(s) in the domain of psychic life.

So is a ‘Laplanchean’ reading of a cultural work possible?

This brings us to our second rubric. It *could*, and with equal legitimacy, be stated that Laplanche’s entire corpus is nothing less (even if it is also something more) than the extended treatment of a single body of cultural work: namely, the Freudian oeuvre. To say so is not to reduce Laplanche’s respect for Freud the scientist, and it is not to imply that the method of reading Freud with Freud amounts to a psychoanalysis of psychoanalysis.

In a manner that is consistent with the views on cultural production we have just sketched, Laplanche situates Freud’s work as a site of reception as well as transmission. This can be witnessed in two ways. First of all, there are the predecessors who influence and the progenitors who take up the Freudian project. We have had too limited a space to provide the details of Laplanche’s treatment of these; but to name only a few one could mention, on one side, thinkers as diverse as Georg Groddeck⁴¹ and Arthur Schopenhauer⁴² (and, indeed, Copernicus), and on the other side, Klein, Lacan and the ego psychologists.⁴³ What was brought to Freud, what in Freud’s own heritage he gathered up and laboured (not always successfully) to rework and recompose within the parameters of his own singular and developing thought—these elements, Laplanche argues, inform the insights as well as the blindnesses which have been carried forth by his legacy and redeveloped in their turn. If applied psychoanalysis cannot obtain within a Laplanchean framework, it is because Laplanche’s entire framework is built around problematising the ‘within’: the within of

Freudian-Lacanian transindividualism see Laplanche (1987a) pp. 29-45, and the ‘Transference...’ paper we are presently expounding, pp. 225-6.

⁴¹ See Laplanche (1999C), esp. pp. 142-63.

⁴² See Laplanche (1999A [1992f]), p. 67.

Freud's own oeuvre as much as the corresponding object which it is dedicated to conceptualising.

Indeed, secondly and equally, Laplanche's interpretative proposition regarding the occlusive connivance between Freud's thought and its object situates the Freudian corpus within a more general and, in effect, unendable relation of antecedence which makes particular but enigmatic demands with regard to Freud's futural reception. Freud's oeuvre is an attempt to think and to master the question of subjectivity—a gesture which is not only already 'non-clinical' and which predates psychoanalysis, but the very gesture in which Laplanche perceives the origin of the subject as such. Freud's legacy is not, for him, a clear or univocal message, but one unavoidably saturated by contradictions and coverings-over: it expects and demands translation, decomposition and recomposition. It is regarded as a product of its received heritage and its privileged object. As itself a source of transmission, the singularity of its discovery, for Laplanche, is sought as much in what it expresses as what it represses and disclaims.

I do not wish to reduce Laplanche's corpus to an mere interpretative performance of the general theory of seduction; but the parallel is, I suggest, fundamental to his enterprise, and offers a fresh and suggestive starting point for any attempt to reckon with Freud's own theoretical relationship to cultural production. Bearing in mind the exposition and suggestions which we have put forth under our two separate rubrics, let us now attempt to delimit what was earlier and only provisionally described as the 'methodological' procedure of this dissertation.

⁴³ On these see Laplanche (1987a), esp. part two.

Putting Freud to work with tragedy

Psychoanalysis is not master in its own house. I repeat, though now more fully, the first quotation of this Introduction: ‘Can it not be maintained’, says Laplanche, ‘that [psychoanalysis] is *originally* at home in its reflections on Sophocles, on Shakespeare, on jokes? In *culture*, therefore’ (1999A [1992e] p. 221). As the condition of possibility for the endurance and renewal of cultural productions, the notions of interpellation, transmission and translation antedate their disclosure by early psychoanalytic theory (and thus their formalisation, ‘with Freud’, by Jean Laplanche) in regard to ontogenesis more generally. Psychoanalysis cannot be exported to culture, since the very persistence of culture already and visibly entails the procedures which are at the heart of Freud’s most radical, if marginalised, discoveries concerning subjectivity. But, moreover, psychoanalysis is, and will always and already have been itself a site of cultural reception. It will never be enough to say: ‘Freud and/or psychoanalysis interprets cultural works, like those of Sophocles or Shakespeare, in this or that manner’. The activity of interpretation presupposes the stimulation and incitement of interpellation. In other words: whatever they produce creatively by way of interpretation, Freud himself, and psychoanalysis itself will always have been in a relationship to culture which is not extrinsic to the evolutionary laws of cultural production *themselves*. From the very outset—*originally*—psychoanalysis is, in part at least, an active response, a translation (with all its necessary failures) of cultural works or messages. It forms and establishes itself in the attempt to master the textual enigmas of such ‘others’ as Sophocles and Shakespeare. They are irrevocably lodged,

implanted within it—an internal alterity in relation to which psychoanalysis will have emerged as it-self.

The most fundamental assumption in what follows, then, is that if the tragic texts of Sophocles and Shakespeare do not ‘belong’ to psychoanalysis, nor are the interpretative strategies of psychoanalysis improper or inadequate to them. Sophocles and Shakespeare exist originarily and constitutively within the fabric of psychoanalysis, whose interior—whose ‘within’—is already thereby fractured, not fully proper to itself, but indebted to these others the messages of whom it has sought to master.

It follows that our implicit starting point is the charge that in Freud’s project of seeking to master the textual enigmas of Sophocles and Shakespeare something goes unassimilated, gets lost or repressed along the way. It will by now be clear that I believe these repressions are bound up with the abandonment of the seduction theory, which was announced to Fliess less than a month before Freud wrote to him on 15 October 1897 with his interpretations of *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*. The work of the following three chapters is directed towards articulating and rendering explicit the functions of otherness, the enigma, transmission and translation as they operate within our three tragedies themselves: that is, those things which I have tried to suggest already structure their own general relation, as cultural messages, to psychoanalytic theory.

For Laplanche the task of the analyst is not, and by definition of course cannot be, the attempt to master or to solve the enigmas of the patient’s psychic life. The task is one of reconstruction. This cannot be understood in a naïve sense of mnemonic retrieval, of a full and exact reproduction of ‘what actually happened’ or ‘what actually happened when...’ For a start, if the unconscious is the repository of psychical reality, then the analyst’s

bearing towards its contents cannot be governed by the assumption that they are reducible only to material events, or to memories that would relate solely to a material reality.

Between the analyst and the patient—itself a renewed and stimulating relation of subject to other—what is to be reconstructed is a process which would include the message, the subject's attempt to translate or metabolise it, and what was lost in that effort:

The aim is not to restore a more intact past [...] but to allow in turn a deconstruction of the [patient's] old, insufficient, partial and erroneous construction, and hence to open the way to the new translation, which the patient, in his compulsion to synthesize (or, as the German Romantics might have put it, in his 'drive to translate'), will not fail to produce.

(Laplanche 1999A [1992b] p. 164)

It would be both hubristic and irresponsible to identify the project of literary interpretation with the task of the analyst in the treatment. These remarks on the process of deconstruction and reconstruction remain pertinent, however. In its most general orientation, the intention of the present thesis is not to supply a simply alternative or final reading of the tragic texts which impact upon Freud. It is not to present them in a 'more intact' form than Freud left them. It is, rather, to attempt to comprehend how, and by what governing principles Freud works to synthesise them with his own, correlatively developing interpretative apparatus. On the basis of this, it is to begin to disclose at the level of these three great and important texts, what has remained unsynthesised by, and unassimilated into the theory.

The selection of tragedies that I will be considering—*Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*—is, therefore, wholly determined in advance by Freud. They are texts which had a special importance for him. Moreover, fully in accordance with the dominant tendency of Freud's thought after 1897, all three feature what, to be consistent with the terms we have already mapped out, can be described as a centring of subjectivity: a

principal protagonist's assumption of an identity, and a dramatic reconstruction of the epistemological field which makes that assumption possible. Laplanche often calls the letter in which Freud disclaims the seduction theory the 'letter of the equinox'. The term of course refers to the letter's dispatch on 21 September. But it also resonates with the astronomical model that Laplanche seeks to reinvigorate, and positions the letter as a sort of fulcrum point on which the swing from an exogenous to an endogenous model of ontogenesis is hinged. Our three tragedies can be considered analogously 'equinoctial'. Each is cuspid. Each is positioned, in the context of its production and/or in the historical field wherein its drama takes place, at a moment of disjunction, upheaval, transition. With *Oedipus Tyrannus* we have the dramatic treatment of an archaic legend, onto which is transposed the philosophical revolution of Sophocles' fifth-century Athens—a revolution which sought to dispose of the claims of ancestry and affirm the egoic sovereignty of the rational human subject. With *Julius Caesar* we are confronted with the second Republican revolution of Rome, the assertion of liberty and political autonomy against the infiltration of external control in the form of (alleged) tyranny. With *Hamlet* we have an implicitly Protestant framework in which the ostensible failure of the ancestor's message generates a hero whose apparent interiority has so often been connected with the inauguration of modernity. I will reserve the textual and contextual elaboration of these points for the individual chapters themselves. For now it is only necessary to note that the critical heritage of all three tragedies, before, with and after Freud, has continued to be preoccupied with their articulation and affirmation of 'the subject' as autonomous: Oedipus the fifth-century philosopher; Brutus the revolutionary libertarian; Hamlet the modern, interiorised human. My argument, my 'thesis' is that in dramatising the different points of equinoctial

transition, each text can be seen to demonstrate the very decentring which makes such autonomous closure—or, rather the illusion of it—possible.

As a final point, I would emphasise the fact that I will be drawing on the resources of psychoanalysis generally and Laplanche especially to work towards this end. Not, to repeat, in order to reinstate psychoanalytic mastery, but to displace the assumption of mastery by putting Freud face to face with the disjunctions and alterities which already inhabit these texts but have remained unintegrated by their psychoanalytic recipient. The readings which I produce of the tragedies are not, however, ‘Laplanchean’. Or, more exactly, they are Laplanchean precisely insofar as they do not presuppose a hermeneutic or programmatically applied system of interpretation which the generic suffix would imply (hence the provisional character of our use of the term ‘methodology’). In each case it is a question of requiring and allowing the text, in its singularity, to ‘open the way’ towards a renewed and developed psychoanalytic approach.

Parricide and drama

In the second preface to *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud’s first major solo publication, and the book in which he begins to set out what will become the dominant themes of parricide and incest, he describes the death of a man’s father as ‘the most important event, the most poignant loss of [his] life’ (p. 47). The loss of the father, this ‘event’, is the principal tie which connects our three tragedies; not, however, as a biological inevitability, but as a structural necessity which both enables and compromises the subject’s self, its ‘I’.

Freud's intellectual relationship to 'the space of dramatic representation', as Lyotard puts it, is closely bound to the structural importance he accords to the death of the father.⁴⁴ As early as 1905-6 he records his concurrence with the view that tragic drama grew out of sacrificial rites relating to the sacrifice of the goat (*tragos*) (1942 [1905-6] p. 122-3). Nearly a decade later, when he returns to the origin of tragedy in *Totem and Taboo* (1913 [1912-3]) it is in the context of laying a 'foundation' for psychoanalysis—a basis for the psychological origin of the subject which reaches back to the prehistoric period.

In *Totem*, he borrows from Darwin the (ultimately mythical) model of the primal horde—the primeval tribe of sons, ruled over by a vicious, tyrannical and sexually prohibitive father. Freud describes their revenge upon the primal father: united in courage, they killed him and devoured him. For Freud, their cannibalistic gesture manifests not only the sons' hatred of their tyrant:

The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished [an] identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength.

(1913 [1912-3] p. 203)

The primal father is murdered in order that the brothers gain their liberty; and yet in becoming free of him, they become him—quite literally placing him inside themselves, incorporating/internalising him. They are freed from the father in the act of identifying with him: they identify with him in order to free themselves. As we will be seeing in more detail in chapter two, Freud's account of the immediate aftermath of this parricidal event is directed by a logic of *après coup*. It is a crime that occurs before, but which is seen to

⁴⁴ It was said at the outset that I wish to give only some form of response to Lyotard's question regarding Freud's 'belief' in dramatic representation. What I have to say here is related solely to the interests of the present thesis, and concerns only the intellectual dimension in which Freud tries to think the ritual of tragic drama. My comments are in no way intended to displace the imperative nature of Lyotard's more general

bring about, the concept of a 'crime' (p. 222).⁴⁵ Now, it is the brutal collective life of this horde which, through the appeal to phylogenesis, Freud will go on to situate as the inherited core of contemporary psychic life.⁴⁶ But innate memory traces are not the only means by which the actions of the horde are shown to persist beyond their immediate provenance. Freud argues that the sense of guilt which is, for the first time, awakened by this parricide lies at the heart of ritualistic, totemic sacrifice and collective festivals in general. Their implicit purpose is to be both a triumphant repetition of the first libertarian deed and a commemorative homage to its victim. Tragedy too, he claims, participates in this ambivalent replay: a purgative display of suffering and death which is to be enjoyed as well as lamented (pp. 217-29).

I do not, of course, find Freud's view convincing in any literal sense, and I have no intention of working through it in detail here. But it is crucial to recognise that he perceives tragic representation as both a repetition of and a monument to the inaugural death of the primal father—an event in which the sons' free themselves from a paternal and tyrannical 'other'; but in which that freedom is attained at the paradoxical cost of incorporating him and bearing him within.

It is hardly a coincidence that the three tragedies which are to be examined in this thesis as being important for Freud, have the death of a father or father-figure as a central motif. My concern is with the gesture of parricide as the event by which the subject—the hero—is brought into being *as* subject, assumes his identity, in relation to it. Within each tragedy the echo of the Delphic imperative (Know Thyself) will recur as a possibility only

questioning of Freud's privileging of *theatre* as such, nor the project of rethinking psychoanalysis in relation to alternative forms of representation.

⁴⁵ I make no attempt to reduce or to justify the problematic character of this formulation. For an extremely productive treatment of it see Derrida (1982).

in connection with the elimination of the paternal other, be that a real or quasi-symbolic gesture. At the centre of the individual argument of each chapter, however, my purpose is to demonstrate that the liberty or autonomy which is achieved remains compromised by the prior and determinate registration *of* the paternal other. ‘Self-knowledge’ is made possible by the elimination of an alterity which *already and constitutively* inhabits the interior of, and thus fractures the self. Incorporation-metabolisation: there is in Laplanche the ghost of a suggestion that his own model of the metabola, of interiorising, breaking-down and recomposing (in short, psychically digesting) the parental other, might be instructive in putting to work Freud’s primal myth.⁴⁷ It is my intention to bring to bear the paradox which Freud describes in the primal crime upon three of the texts which, in the Freudian schema, represent its ritual repetition, even if in Freud’s interpretations the avenue of the other always and nonetheless remains closed.

Before giving chapter summaries, a further, proleptic point should be made. I have already given one or two indications of Laplanche’s displacement of the centrality of the Oedipus complex. For him it is not an internal or universal necessity, but a secondary formation, a creative production which emerges as one means among others of synthesising childhood interventions from the outside. The preoccupation with fathers and sons in this dissertation is not to be understood, therefore, as a reinstatement of an Oedipal theme. I am far less concerned with any hero’s ‘Oedipal’ trajectory than with the prior relation to alterity on which the hero’s subjectivity is first of all based. The Oedipus complex will re-emerge, certainly; but I am engaging with the issue of parricide in a ‘strategic’ way, so to speak. That is to say, as one expression of a more general and more fundamental question:

⁴⁶ See again Freud (1916-7 [1915-7]) p. 415

namely as the privileged site of (and one could say: the privileged metaphor for) the subject's relation to the pre-existing, external other: his originary dependence upon that other and his correlative and constitutive need to seal himself off from (and, in these texts, eliminate) that other. Remaining within the limits of these tragedies and the role to which parricide is assigned in them, my concern runs the risk of looking andro-, perhaps even hetero-centric. I would merely say that, firstly, while the present work is patently preoccupied with male characters, its own itinerary is determined by Freud's privileging of the texts which it endeavours to re-read. Secondly, that in sticking with this itinerary, it does not seek to shut down the questions of sexual difference and sexual dissidence. On the contrary, while it does not engage with them directly at all, it nonetheless labours towards a more radical perspective within which they might be reopened. I insist, again, on the fact that parricide here is a *strategic* concern. It describes what Laplanche regards as the *primal* relation of subjecthood. Formations of gender, sexuality or Oedipality remain in a productive relation of subjective response to the intervention of alterity: the most urgent questions to be posed connect to precisely how such responses are provoked and made possible by this radical relation to the other.⁴⁸

Thebes, Rome and Denmark

I will quickly outline the procedure of the chapters which follow.

⁴⁷ See Laplanche's comments on the oral basis of incorporation and the digestive process of egoic metabolism in (1999C) pp. 105ff. and 113.

⁴⁸ It is worth noting that in Shakespeare studies, feminist texts like those of Kahn (1981) and Adelman (1992) have been concerned with the 'initiation' of (especially) masculine subjects in tragedy and beyond. Illuminating as their work has been, it remains tied to the assumption that the coming into being of the subject is an *engendering*: i.e. the coming into being of a gendered subject. Laplanche, as we have seen, places the assignment of gender in a secondary relation to the primal situation of seduction. We cannot understand the former without first interrogating the latter. On the theory of seduction and the modalities of sexuality and sexual polarisation see Fletcher (2000).

Freud's claim regarding the death of the father as the most important event in a man's life is biographical. It is invoked in the Preface to the dream book in connection with the death of Jacob Freud on 28 November 1896. *The Interpretation of Dreams* is, as will be seen in chapter one, a text written in mourning for Jacob Freud. With this in mind, each of the following chapters sets out with an explicit reference to *Dreams*, and, what is more, to the ways in which Freud can there be seen to identify—as a (bereaved) son—with the principal 'sons' in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*. In challenging the perceived unicity and self-identity of these tragic figures, I am in no way attempting to suggest that Freud's identifications with them are misguided or can be used to pursue a psycho-biography of Freud. In each case it is simply a question of acknowledging Freud's often implicit gestures of identification, and of attempting to locate within them the elements which can in part be mobilised to pursue a more complex reading of filial subjecthood than Freud's own explicit interpretative take on the tragedies might seem to give.

I dedicate one chapter to each tragedy. Each chapter has a specific set of concerns relating to particular issues in Freud and/or Laplanche, and to the character and heritage of the individual tragedy itself. The chapters are, however, intended to work on a cumulative basis overall; they therefore cross-reference one another in implicit as well as explicit ways.

Chapter one attempts to extend and develop several of the points raised in this Introduction. It proposes a double reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Freud's appropriation of that tragedy in the service of his elaboration of the Oedipus complex. Drawing on Goux (1993), it attempts to situate Freud within what Goux calls the 'Oedipean' heritage of philosophy, and to co-ordinate this tendency with Freud's post-1897

Ptolemaic drift. The chapter does not set forth as such another ‘psychoanalytic’ reading of *Oedipus*, but, rather, suggests that in distinction from the myth which it reworks, Sophocles’ play from the outset problematises and subverts the Oedipean posture of its philosophical reception. Through a close reading of it, and with particular attention to the enigmatic theological agency of the *daimôn*, I suggest that the text can be shown to ‘answer back’ to the presuppositions on which Freud’s initial reading of it is based, and to reaffirm the allogenic character of the hero/subject’s parrincestual transgression.

Chapter two shifts the focus from the Greek *tyrannus* to the early modern English tyrant and his problematic dramatisation in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. The tragedy is one by which Freud always remained fascinated, and to which he makes many ‘minor’ references throughout his published work. My starting point, however, is the question of why, in spite of this preoccupation, Freud never ventures a thorough and consistent interpretation of it in the way he does for *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*. Taking up Freud’s description of primal tyrannicide/parricide in *Totem and Taboo* (one text in which Shakespeare’s play is a palpably absent reference) I argue that Freud’s elaboration of the ‘primal crime’ is bound to a logic of afterwardsness to whose implications he nonetheless remains blind. I propose that *Julius Caesar* is governed by afterwardsness: in its relation to its sources, to the historical event it dramatises, and as regards its own awareness of itself as a repetitious textual and dramatic event. The exclusion of the tragedy from Freud’s principal book on tyrannicide will be seen to be an effect of Shakespeare’s own articulation of enigma and otherness—forces which threaten the self-presence which Freud is led to assign to the primal, parricidal event.

Chapter three is concerned with *Hamlet* and modernity—a connection which Freud points out in his first published engagement with the play. It aims to challenge the inherited assumption that Hamlet ‘repudiates’ or ‘forecloses’ the ancestral call, by setting alongside Old Hamlet’s ghostly imperative to his son Laplanche’s conceptualisation of the violent variant of implantation, *intromission*. Hamlet will be seen not as a figure of the modern subject who is free to forget the dead, but as one who is constrained by the violence of the other’s message to act out, rather than in, the memory of his dead father. The notorious question of Hamlet’s interiorised subjectivity, I argue, must be recast in terms of his prior interpellation by the Ghost, an event which has a significant correspondence with the text’s own interpellation by its generic ancestors. Fulfilling the revenge command entails putting the father to death for a second time. The parricidal posture which is implicit in the required murder of Claudius will be seen as a double bind in which Hamlet’s saturated dependence on the paternal other is disrupted only by the fulfilment of the other’s desire.

Chapter One

Oedipus Tyrannus: Myth, Tragedy and Reading Other-wise

The action of the play consists in nothing other than the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever mounting excitement—a process that can be likened to the work of a psychoanalysis—that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laius, but further that he is the son of the murdered man and of Jocasta.

Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*

Re-situating Oedipus

This chapter seeks to propose something more than (another) psychoanalytic reading of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Its impetus derives from some of the few direct remarks which Laplanche has made concerning the Oedipus complex and its privileged role in psychoanalytic thought. I cite one of these from *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (1987a):

[...] the Oedipus complex is in a sense subject to contingency [...] After all, what will remain of the classic Oedipal triangle [...] in a few decades or a few hundred years? Is anyone prepared to bet on the survival of the Oedipus on which Freud bases his arguments? Is anyone prepared to claim that human beings will cease to be human beings if it does not survive?

(p. 90)

On the view that ontogenesis proceeds from a primary relation with alterity and the invasiveness of the other, the postulation of a non-contingent Oedipus complex is intolerable. Although Laplanche has not produced a single, sustained analysis of the Oedipus complex, it is clear that it is not for him, as it was for Freud, the ‘shibboleth’ of

psychoanalysis. This is not to say that Laplanche rejects it: he acknowledges its prevalence and significance, but is concerned to approach it as a secondary formation—secondary in relation to the prior, structurally necessary intervention of the human other, and thus as a portion of the creative psychical response which that intervention provokes. In analysis, he says elsewhere, Oedipal reference should be used not as a hermeneutic key to decode the innate and innermost desires of every patient, but in order to ‘retrace [...] the paths of a structure of family relations offered culturally to the individual since childhood as a privileged system of self-theorization’ (1999A [1992b] p. 164 n.]).

In what follows I will be concerned with Sophocles’ text as one, singular version of the myth which has given its name to this privileged structure of kinship relations. My trajectory will entail intervowen analyses of the myth (in its permeation of Western thought) and its specifically tragic rendering. It is my central charge that, in its distinction from the myth, Sophocles’ tragedy articulates the provoking force behind the Oedipal crimes of parricide and incest, in terms of the eponymous subject’s more fundamental (i.e. primal) relation to an enigmatic alterity. I want to argue that while—and indeed, because—Freud’s own clinical thought in general can be shown to be strongly oriented by the philosophical heritage of the Oedipus myth, it remains blind to the specificity of the tragedy. The *primal* and determining crime of the latter, I suggest, is intersubjective, and features a constitutive inscription upon the passive body of the son by the father, which in terms of its collective remembrance in the play, is comparable with the scenes of paternal chastisement described by Freud (and since taken up by Laplanche) in ‘A Child is Being Beaten’ (1919a).

Before re-opening the issue raised in the Introduction regarding how Freud goes about interpreting *Oedipus Tyrannus*, I will begin by outlining a point which, it will be seen, is inseparable from it: namely, the privileged relation which Freud perceives between himself and Oedipus as thinker.

The divination of 'riddles'

In the second volume of his biography of Freud, Ernest Jones (1967) relates the occurrence of a 'curious incident' on the occasion of Freud's fiftieth birthday. A group of his adherents in Vienna presented him with the gift of a medallion carrying on one side a profile of Freud in bas-relief, and on the other a Greek design of Oedipus answering the Sphinx encircled with an inscription taken from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*:

'ΟΣ ΤΑ ΚΛΕΙΝ' ΑΙΝΙΓΜΑΤ' 'ΗΙΔΗ ΚΑΙ ΚΡΑΤΙΣΤΟΣ 'ΗΝ ΑΝΗΡ.

Jones offers the following translation: 'Who divined the famous riddle and was a man most mighty' (1967 p. 15).¹ It is a somewhat overdetermined rendering, one which perhaps mystifies, in the verb 'divine', the intellectual skills of both Freud and Oedipus in the face of their respective 'riddles'; but we will have cause to address the significance of this in a moment. In any case, Jones tells us that at the presentation of the medallion when Freud read the inscription,

he became pale and agitated and in a strangled voice demanded to know who had thought of it. He behaved as if he had seen a *revenant*, and so he had. After [Paul] Federn told him it was he who had chosen the inscription Freud disclosed that as a young student at the University of Vienna he used to stroll around the great Court inspecting the busts of former famous professors of the institution. He then had the phantasy, not

¹ Jones attributes the translation to a colleague named Dr. Hitschmann.

merely of seeing his own bust there in the future, which would not have been anything remarkable in an ambitious student, but of it actually being inscribed with the identical words he now saw on the medallion.

(p. 15)

Forty-nine years later, and ever loyal to Freud, Jones ‘fulfil[led]’ the ‘youthful wish’ of the founder of psychoanalysis by adding to the bust of Freud that had since been erected in the University Court the same Sophoclean inscription as that on the medallion. ‘It is’, he tells us, ‘a very rare example of such a day-dream of adolescence coming true in every detail, even if it took eighty years to do so’ (p. 15).

This wish fulfilment, as it is referred to by Jones who acts like a belated *deus ex machina* to bring it about, adds another ring to a concentric pattern of ‘riddle-solving’ which is legible in this brief but significant anecdote. Let us go back a few stages in order to break it down into its three principal moments. The first concerns Oedipus’ solution (‘divination’ as Jones wants to call it) of *ta klein’ ainigmata*. The line from Sophocles, cited and translated in Jones’s text, is lifted from the final Choral speech in the Exodos of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1525). What is at stake here is of course Oedipus’ solution to the (famous) riddle of the Sphinx—an event which is moreover connected with the other riddles that confront the hero in the course of the tragedy: the identity of Laius’ killer, the origin of Oedipus’ birth, and, what is the sum of these two, the riddle of his very identity:²

Tiresias: This day shall be your parent and your destroyer.

Oedipus: How riddling and obscure in excess are all your words!

[*hōs pant agan ainikta kasaphê legeis*]

Tiresias: Do you not excel in answering such riddles?

Oedipus: You taunt me in matters in which you shall find me great!

(438-441)

The second moment might be described as Freud’s *identification* with Oedipus as riddle-solver. It is a dynamic, which as other commentators have noted elsewhere, persisted

throughout Freud's career, and, as Jones's anecdote suggests, seems to have preceded biographically the discovery of psychoanalysis as such.³ In her article 'Oedipal Textuality: Reading Freud's Reading of *Oedipus*' (1986), Cynthia Chase points out that the writing of *The Interpretation of Dreams* takes form both consciously and unconsciously as an 'Oedipal' endeavour. No less than Oedipus' inquiry, she argues, Freud's investigation into dreams is undertaken in relation to and for the sake of the (dead) father. In the second Preface, Freud offers the dream book as 'a portion of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father's death' (Freud 1900 p. 47; cited in Chase 1986 p. 58). If Oedipus' tragic career is definitively marked with the confrontation by and 'divination' of riddles, so too is Freud's, and from the moment he first asks himself in just what the compelling power of Sophocles' play resides.⁴ 'Freud riddles', says Chase: 'Do dreams have a meaning? What meaning? Why is it distorted? And in the course of interrogating the significance of dreams he comes to interrogate the significance of audience response to dramatic presentation, and the particular riddle of the universal effectiveness of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* for generation after generation of audiences' (Chase 1986 p. 58). *The Interpretation of Dreams*—a foundational text for psychoanalytic theory—thus addresses itself to the riddle of the riddle: the riddle of why the riddle of the Phocal crime should be so absorbing. The riddle of dreams and of the extraordinary power of the Oedipus play intersect and become explicable for Freud in terms of the theory of wish fulfilment and the 'internal necessity' of parrincestual desire. '[Oedipus]' destiny moves us', Freud explains in 1900, 'only because it might have been ours—because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as

² We will have more to say about these connections below.

³ Rudnytsky (1987) has a good deal to say on Freud's identification with Oedipus, including the medallion incident. In his biographical account, however, he also traces Freud's privileged relation to the tragedy much further back than 1900 or even 1897: see esp. pp. 11-12.

upon him [...] *Here is one in whom the primeval wishes of childhood have been fulfilled* (Freud 1900 p. 364, emphasis added). Thus, writes Chase, Freud answers the riddles before him ‘by the discovery of repression and by positing the unconscious’ (Chase 1986 pp. 58-9). Oedipus fulfils our desire no less than do our dreams. A practical psychoanalysis, Freud argues in the famous passage which we have cited as an epigraph, will, therefore, resemble the action of the play; the analyst who divines the riddle of the analysand’s dreams will enact, as did Oedipus, ‘a process of revealing’ (Freud 1900 p. 363). In sum, then, Freud’s reading of Oedipus, and the terms in which his analysis is couched, constitute both a deeper explication and a singular repetition of the achievement of Sophocles’ hero as it is summed up by Sophocles’ Chorus: the solution of the *klein’ ainigmata*.

The third concentric ring entails, as we have said, the addition that Jones makes to the bust of Freud in Vienna. This gesture, no less than the presentation of the medallion in 1906, implies the further identification *by his colleagues* of Freud with Oedipus. That is, the augment Jones gives the Viennese statue seems to betray a complicit investment in the notion of Freud-as-Oedipus, an institutionalising inscription of the riddle-solving endeavour of Freud and, what is more, perhaps of psychoanalysis itself. Oedipus solves riddles, Freud solves riddles and the riddles of riddles, and, on the authority of his solutions, the practising analyst will continue along the same trajectory ‘divining’ the riddles of the analysand in order to engage a ‘process of revealing’.

Is there not, however, in Jones’s description of his respectful gesture a kind of circular irony set in play that works against this institutional shoring up of Freud as riddle-solver, and indeed against the Chorus’s summation of Oedipus as just such a diviner?

⁴ Contrary to what Chase’s argument might imply there is, as we will see, a great deal of significance in the fact that *The Interpretation of Dreams* is not the first arena in which Freud poses this riddle.

Oedipus, son of Laius, of course ‘divine[s] the famous riddle’; Freud in his turn divines the riddle of the riddle of the extraordinary force of the tragedy that bears the hero’s name. Oedipus’ destiny, Freud says, moves us because it could have been ours; the riddle of the play’s effectiveness can be solved by a psychoanalytic understanding of the mind and of the experience of seeing its deepest desires played out: Oedipus fulfils our ‘primeval wishes’. The answer to the riddle of the riddle lies with wish fulfilment. And yet, how does Jones describe the monumental entrenching of Freud as riddle-solver—the addition of the Sophoclean inscription to the bust—except as precisely... a *wish fulfilment*. Certainly Jones’s benevolent but belated gesture attempts to consolidate the identification of Freud with Oedipus. But does not his description of this act put the contrary into play as well? In other words, does it not allow us legitimately to ask whether Freud really does divine the riddle of Sophocles’ play (in terms of wish fulfilment) or whether the possibility of divining such a riddle is itself *no more than* a wish fulfilment, a dream?

As we will see, what is ultimately at stake in this anecdotal reference is the very inadequacy of the term ‘riddle’ to describe the provocative demand of the Sphinx. As was pointed out in the Introduction, a riddle presupposes the possibility of its being satisfactorily answered and thus solved. An ‘enigma’ (which has its definitive root in the Greek *ainigma* that appears in Sophocles’ text) is that which demands a response which will always be inadequate, which will always carry a certain remainder. An enigma cannot be ‘solved’ because the logic behind an enigma can never be exhaustively revealed. As we move now to consider the comparable intellectual paths taken by Freud and his identificatory hero Oedipus, we will continue to invoke the term ‘riddle’ in relation both to the Sphinx’s question and to the status of Sophocles’ text as a ‘riddle’ for Freud. We will

continue in this, but only in order, eventually, to disclose its absolute redundancy. It is, we will suggest, precisely and specifically the *enigmatic* character of that which Sophocles' Oedipus is thought to have 'solved' which constitutes his tragedy, and which problematises and interrupts Freud's indentificatory and interpretative 'solution' to the text.

Freud and Oedipus: comparable methodologies

Let us begin our investigation by addressing our first quibble regarding the translation offered by Jones of the line from Sophocles. The verb reproduced by Jones to translate *êidê* (from *oida*, to know) is 'divine'. We have not called this substitution an instance of mistranslation but of overdetermination. To divine can be to perceive, to understand, even to conjecture. But the verb is also freighted with mysticism: to divine is to prophesy, to make out or interpret by supernatural or magic insight what is hidden, obscure or unintelligible to ordinary faculties (OED, sense 1); and it remains rooted etymologically to the Latin *divinus* (from *divus*, a god). Our objection is that both Freud and Oedipus before him find cause to define the methodology of their own riddle-solving by the constitutive rejection of any such mystified origins of thought; a rejection which the root of, and the associative burden carried by, Jones's rendering will not tolerate.

Freud solves the riddle of dreams. In the first chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud presents a survey of the existing literature on the subject, or at least that which has any claim to being 'scientific'. He offers only a brief paragraph on 'the prehistoric view of dreams', because it has less to do with science than with foretelling the future (1900 p. 58). The peoples of prehistory, he acknowledges before moving swiftly on, treated dreams as 'revelations from gods and daemons'; the position adopted towards

dreams by philosophers during this period was thus ‘naturally dependent to some extent upon their attitude towards divination in general’ (1900 p. 58). Freud’s survey only begins in detail, then, with Aristotle, for whom dreams had ‘already become an object of psychological study’ (1900 p. 58). He recalls Aristotle’s famous demystification of the ‘daemonic’ in the *Divinatore per somnum*. Here the philosopher describes dreams—especially veridical dreams—as ‘daimonic, but not divine [*ê gar physis daimona, all’ ou theia*]’ (Aristotle 1996 463 b14-15): not divine because they do not come from any supernatural agent, but daimonic (*daimona*) simply because they nevertheless give the impression that they do.⁵ As David Gallop has glossed this passage: ‘A supposed prevision of some event that actually happens *is* uncanny. For it is *just as if* some agent had warned us of its imminence [...] But nothing of the kind is really true’ (Aristotle 1996 463 b14-5 n.). Freud will return to Aristotle’s insight in the last chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. There he tells us that the respect paid to dreams in antiquity is ‘based upon a correct psychological insight and is the homage paid to the uncontrolled and indestructible forces in the human mind, to the “daemonic” power which is the dream-wish [...]’; in other words, all that, he says, ‘which we find at work in the unconscious’ (1900 p. 775). From the beginning to the end of the dream book, then, Freud—following Aristotle—is attempting to articulate his project (the interpretation of dreams) in a manner definitively opposed to the mystification of divination, instead locating the ‘daemonic’ force recognised in antiquity before Aristotle firmly in the unconscious. Not only can the riddle of dreams not be solved by the appeal to external agencies; but the psychoanalytic method of doing so is elaborated in a space from which supernatural agencies have been definitively exorcised.

⁵ *Daimôn* is, of course, the Greek root of ‘daemon’.

Oedipus solves the famous riddle of the Sphinx. But from the evidence presented in the play, Sophocles' Oedipus would appear to wish, no less than Freud, to operate in a field of thought that is exclusively 'rational'. During the Prologue the Priest, whom Oedipus has asked to speak on behalf of the children gathered before his palace, appeals to Oedipus to repeat now the exemplary greatness he showed in defeating the 'cruel singer' on his arrival at the city (36). That victory, he says, proved Oedipus to be the 'first of men' when it came to 'dealing with the higher powers [*daimones*]' (34); and now it is said and believed that Oedipus was at that time given 'extra strength [...] by a god [*theos*]' (38). Oedipus makes no immediate response to this. Instead, he stakes his claim to independent endeavour during his argument with Tiresias. Once he has browbeaten the prophet into revealing what he claims to know (namely, that Oedipus is himself the killer he seeks) Oedipus begins to disparage his interlocutor's supposed insight as a diviner. He takes as his ammunition Tiresias's impotence in the face of the Sphinx:

Why, come, tell me, how can you be a true prophet [*mantis*]? Why when the versifying hound was here did not you speak some word that could release the citizens? Indeed, her riddle [*ainigma*] was not one for the first comer to explain! It required prophetic skill, and you were exposed as having no knowledge from the birds or from the gods. No, it was I that came, Oedipus who knew nothing, and put a stop to her; I hit the mark by native wit [*gnomê*], not by what I learned from birds or from the gods
(391-6)

The speech represents not only a personal attack on the prophet; it is also an attack on his art, the staging of an opposition between two very different kinds of understanding.

Oedipus denigrates Tiresias' traditional mantic wisdom, the knowledge revealed in external signs sent by the gods. But he also opposes to it his own *gnomê*, a term laden with scientific and philosophical significance in fifth-century Athens.⁶ It describes his modern, sophistic,

⁶ See Knox (1957) p. 125

capacity to reason,⁷ to think *for himself* and figure things out: his ‘*native wit*’ as Lloyd-Jones neatly translates it. Oedipus does not need to look outside himself for the answer to the Sphinx. Her riddle, so he claims, could not be solved by an appeal to divine agencies.

Now there is an ostensible dissimilarity at the heart of this parallel between the exclusively non-divinatory modes of reasoning propounded by Freud and by Sophocles’ tragic hero. Freud’s principal concern is to exorcise original mysticism (the daimonic) from the riddle which is his object of study, namely the dream. The riddle does not emerge from a daimonic source. As we know, however, in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Sophocles makes it explicit in the Priest’s plea that the Sphinx is herself a *daimôn* (34); therefore Oedipus’ pronouncements on his own *gnomé* appear to refer only to his ability to solve her riddle without help from the birds or the gods. The daimonic *source* of the riddle does not seem to be called in to question. This ostensible discrepancy, however, in fact encloses a far more radical connection between the methodologies of Freud and Oedipus in answer to their respective riddles than we have hitherto suggested. In order to identify it let us first briefly attempt to situate Sophocles’ play historically and culturally.

Deprojection: the defeat of the Sphinx

Bernard Knox (1957), in a book part of whose project was to disentangle *Oedipus Tyrannus* from psychoanalytic interpretations, writes that Sophocles’ Oedipus, in his character and mode of action, is inseparable from the extraordinary intellectual revolution of fifth-century Athens.⁸ This radical enlightenment was marked by the birth of a new confidence in the power of man’s rational activity and the affirmation of a secular view of

⁷ On Sophocles’ use of the word *gnomé* and its relation to sophism see Gould (1970, trans.) 398 n.

⁸ The thesis is also taken up in a more recent text by Goldhill (1986) pp. 199 ff.

human progress and the human condition. As its emblem commentators have often appealed to the celebrated Choral ‘Ode to Man’ in Sophocles’ *Antigone*,⁹ with its encomium to the civilising power of ‘formidable’ man as the master of nature. Man has conquered the earth, the sea, wild beasts, even sickness by his own knowledge (*sophos*) and skill (*technê*); with speech and thought he has created the pinnacle of civilised achievement, the *polis*; and man has ‘taught himself’ these virtues. It is no coincidence, as Knox shows, that also during the course of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Oedipus will be metaphorically presented as helmsman (conqueror of the sea), ploughman (conqueror of the land), and hunter (pursuer and tamer of wild nature) (Knox 1957 p. 111). Sophocles’ treatment of the Oedipus myth explicitly identifies the hero with the ego-centred revolution of the fifth century. Oedipus is an autodidact who claims to succeed by native wit alone; a Periclean *tyrannus* whose right to the crown of Thebes is not inherited but won.¹⁰ He is a philosopher; he defeats the Sphinx not with violence, like Bellerophon who kills the Chimaera or Perseus the Gorgon, but with intelligence, *gnomê*. Oedipus refuses traditional wisdom. Instead his speech is riddled with the vocabulary which characterises the unparalleled critical and creative activities of fifth-century science, philosophy, and medicine. He questions, examines, infers; his progress is marked by human endeavour, not by signs divined from the birds and the gods. Protagoras the sophist, Knox recalls, had said that ‘Man is the measure of all things’; and what is Oedipus’ answer to the Sphinx, but ‘Man’ (Knox 1957 p. 110)?

Knox reads this intellectual revolution as the narcissistic movement of ‘anthropocentrism’ (p. 110). But it represents more. There is, as Jean Joseph Goux has

⁹ See lines 332-375.

¹⁰ On the similarities between Oedipus and Pericles see Knox (1957) pp. 23, 63-4 and 77.

argued in *Oedipus, Philosopher* (1993), a crucial distinction to be made between anthropocentrism and the new posture taken on in the intellectual disciplines during the fifth-century. Radical upheavals in philosophy, art and politics evince rather what Goux calls the posture of *anthropocentrism*:

For it is no longer a question of unwittingly attributing human qualities to the world, of projecting onto being an array of motives, feelings and intentions that belong to the human soul alone [which is implied by ‘anthropocentrism’]. Quite the contrary, it is a matter of recognising that such projections have already been made, and of withdrawing those investments that had charged the universe unduly with human *pathos*, in order to restore them to the self.

(p. 119)

The earliest evidence we have of this movement is offered by Xenophanes of Colophon, who, Goux tells us, ‘recognizes that the gods (at least the gods as people imagine them to be) are only projections emanating from man [...]“The Ethiopians [says Xenophon] say of their gods that they are snub-nosed and black; the Thracians claim that they have blue eyes and red hair”’ (Goux 1993 p. 119). The withdrawal of projections leads to the recognition that the beings earlier viewed as supernatural are products of the human imagination. Man realises himself not simply as the egoistic centre of the universe but also as the source and agent of all that has been projected onto it. Thus for the first time man discovers the world as an object (rather than a sign) and comes to situate himself as subject. Socratic dialogue, democratic debate, foreshortening in painting, optical correction in architecture—all these developments manifest the taking into account of the unique viewpoint of a thinking, perceiving, desiring subject (p. 121). If the mythical Oedipus’ answer proves fatal to the versifying hound,

it is because [says Goux] the answer ‘man’ typifies the anthropocentrism move whereby all gods, demons, or other monsters are recognized as mere products of the human imagination, related back to man, and thus

disavowed as independent beings with powers of their own. She does not have to be killed in bloody hand-to-hand combat [...] Oedipus has only to withdraw his projective belief by reducing every enigma to man, by establishing man as the unique source and agent; that is all it takes to make the Sphinx vanish before his eyes.

(p. 120)

The aforementioned comparison between Oedipus and Pericles is revealed to be yet deeper in an anecdote told by Plutarch. When a sudden eclipse of the sun terrifies Pericles' helmsman, the Athenian leader places his cloak before the helmsman's eyes and explains that the eclipse is caused by no more than the intervention of an opaque object like the cloak. The helmsman is, says Goux, given a lesson in perspective. Pericles teaches him to regard the universe not as a series of celestial hieroglyphics whose meaning must be divined by a seer, but as subject to the laws of optics. Pericles triumphs over 'the sacred terror of darkness' with a wisdom that runs counter to that of the diviners; '[a]nd in this respect his intellectual victory [...] has the same meaning as Oedipus' triumph over the Sphinx' (p. 129). For '[b]y situating himself as a viewpoint on the world', Goux tells us, echoing Protagoras, 'as the central and unique measure of all things, man simultaneously acquires the objective view that solves all riddles, calms all terrors, hurls all Sphinxes into the abyss' (p. 129).

Let us be clear that Goux claims to be concerned less with Sophocles' tragedy than the myth on which Sophocles' draws and the cultural milieu which defines the intellectual stance of the hero that inhabits his tragedy. Goux suggests, then, that when the mythical Oedipus answers the Sphinx, and when Sophocles' Oedipus talks about his past victory (and his future enquiries) like a fifth-century philosopher, the very nature of that first victory, of the answer 'Man' that he gave, cannot simply be read as a triumph over the

Sphinx on her own terms, but as a deprojection of belief in the daimonic character of the riddle's origin.

If the riddle-solving postures of Freud and Oedipus seem to overlap further in this reduction of daimonic origins, however, it is no question of fortuitous similarity. In fact for Goux, Western thought at least since Descartes has founded itself on the deprojective posture, and Freud too is caught in its lure. If we are to attempt to understand this claim, we must first trace Goux's argument concerning the myth of Oedipus in a little more detail.

The monomyth and its 'Oedipean' perversion

There is inadequate space here to give Goux's thesis the detailed critique that it deserves. Let us simply note that for him Oedipus' story is a mythic anomaly which, since the Enlightenment, has become as it were the perverse and retrospective primal scene of Western philosophy. Goux presents a contrastive mythological analysis of Greek myths of royal investiture—Perseus, Bellerophon, and Jason. In all of these he finds the following sequence of motifs: (1) An oracular warning is given to the present king that a male child (the hero-to-be) is a threat to his life. (2) The young hero escapes from the murderous intentions of the king. He flees or is sent to grow up elsewhere, until he comes into conflict with a new 'father'-king who, fearing for his own life assigns the hero a dangerous task or trial. (3) The trial takes the form of a violent confrontation with a (female) monster. The hero succeeds with the help of a god, a sage, or his future bride. (4) The hero's triumph over the monster enables him to marry the daughter of the king.

What concern us immediately are parts 3 and 4. The fourth episode insofar as it involves marriage to the daughter of a king confers on the trial which leads to it the status

of an initiatory passage bearing the symbolic force of matricide. By reference to structural anthropology, Goux demonstrates that the essential dimension of the masculine puberty rite, becoming a (heterosexual) man, consists in the symbolic death of the mother's child and his renaissance into the paternal milieu as the son of his ancestors. It entails, he argues, a violent separation from the mother, and an incorporation into the fathers' world with the acquisition and status of 'manhood' that makes marriage and procreation possible (p. 42). Now in heroic myths the young hero's combat with the dangerous female monster typically allows him to liberate a woman and acquire a kingdom. Goux traces this motif to its earliest form and shows that the confrontation originally involved the actual ingestion by the monster of the hero, who thus kills her from within only to be victoriously regurgitated. The hero is both the one who is swallowed, who dies symbolically, and the one who kills the swallower; so that on the one hand his victory over the monstrous female can only be achieved once he has undergone a symbolic death, and on the other, part of him dies, so to speak, with the monster. To be sure, the myths in Goux's analysis present moderated versions of this extreme configuration of the male rite of passage.¹¹ But what is significant is that in this 'monomythic' structure, as Goux calls it, the killing of the monster remains a decisive phase in the itinerary of the hero; the one which makes possible the liberation of the woman: 'at the moment of victory over the monster and thus at the moment of initiatory renaissance, the young woman is always liberated and obtained in marriage' (p. 47).

In the case of the Oedipus myth the father-king indeed receives an oracular warning of impending danger from his son, and Oedipus is left exposed and brought up in Corinth

¹¹ E.g. Bellerophon kills the Chimaera by dropping lead into her mouth, which melts in the heat of her own breath. She remains killed 'from within'. Goux also mentions an Attic vase painting that shows Jason being regurgitated in front of Athena by the dragon who guards the Golden Fleece.

as the child of Polybus and Merope. And the Sphinx certainly conforms to Goux's requirements as the mother-monster that must be at once courted and conquered. He states:

[...] a seductive woman and a devouring dog [...] The Sphinx, and not a father, is the being to whom is imputed the torture and death of the son—because of the desire she arouses. It is [...] significant that in certain versions, the Sphinx is held to be an animal that makes young people uneasy because of the sexual relations she would seek to have with them. Here can be read the young man's dangerous desire for negative, dark, animal femininity [...] [The initiand] has to experience the fact that his own desire for the dark mother is lethal. It is this confrontation alone that allows, after a symbolic death, the hero's rebirth with a new identity.

(pp. 36-7)

But for Oedipus there is no trace of the trial imposed by the second king. Rather there is an altercation with the true father, Laius, which in fact leads to parricide. The killing of the Sphinx is not an assigned task: 'Oedipus braves the encounter of his own free will' (p. 11). But it is also not even a killing. The Sphinx, appalled by the audacity of the man who is able to think of the answer to her riddle, simply commits suicide. There is no violent confrontation, no warrior's daring. Oedipus remains singularly unseduced by the Sphinx, and the bride-prize is his own mother. 'It is as if', Goux claims, 'explaining the riddle was not a complete and adequate trial, not sufficient to endow the hero with the full capacity to marry the princess' (p. 11). If Oedipus fulfils the fourth phase in a perverted fashion (incest) it is because he has failed to undergo fully the trials of initiation. Rather he has 'short-circuited [the Sphinx's] disturbing charms with a well-chosen word [Man]', which amounts not to necessary monsticide but to the 'intellectual avoidance of seduction by the monster, and the philosopher's dispensation from the task of murdering her' (pp. 37-8). In Goux's analysis at least—and this claim will prove crucial to our subsequent argument—Oedipus will not be initiated into the kinship of the fathers; rather, he murders his father, then in his encounter with the Sphinx asserts the autonomy of his own reason. Thus, Goux

states, Oedipus emerges not, as for Freud, as the emblem of a universal pattern of desire, but as a skewed version of the norm: 'it is the monomyth (in its amply attested universality) and not the singular history of Oedipus that contains the truth of masculine destiny and desire' (p. 31).

We will return to this bold statement later in the chapter. For the moment we may note that according to Goux his analysis of what he calls the 'Oedipean' posture—the self-bastardising, autodidactic avoidance of initiation—makes it possible to trace its later appearances conclusively. 'Oedipus', he argues, 'is the inventor of this new posture destined for a great future that singularizes the West' (p. 163). Its presence in Freud's own intellectual heritage is palpable. In order to grasp this, let us resume the question of philosophy and its relation to Oedipus.¹²

The Oedipean posture of philosophy

Goux identifies the Cartesian revolution, Descartes' setting himself up as a thinker with no master but himself—*cogito ergo sum*—as being radically bound to Oedipus' subversive anthropocentring undertaking (pp. 159-63). But it is Hegel, in his *Aesthetics* (1835) who first explicitly mentions Oedipus and identifies him as a fully inaugural figure for philosophy; and we will not be surprised to find that, as Freud will claim in *The Interpretation of Dreams* seventy years later, the career of Oedipus, for Hegel too, stages a process of *revealing*:

The Sphinx propounded the well-known conundrum: What is it that in the morning goes on four legs, at mid-day on two, and in the evening on three? Oedipus found the simple answer: a man, and he tumbled the Sphinx from the rock. The explanation of the symbol lies in the absolute

¹² In the interests of space and clarity Goux's detailed and complex account of the Oedipean posture taken by Western philosophy must be rather abbreviated. See Goux (1993) chapters eight and nine.

meaning, in the spirit, just as the famous Greek [Delphic] inscription calls to man: Know thyself. The light of consciousness is the clarity which makes its concrete content shine clearly through the shape belonging and appropriate to itself, and in its [objective] existence reveals itself alone.

(Hegel 1835 p. 361)

For Hegel, Egyptian works of art are obscure; a symbol or a hieroglyph does “not signify [...] itself but hint[s] at another thing with which it has affinity and therefore relationship”

(Hegel 1835; cited in Goux 1993 p. 164). Egyptian symbolism lacks the autonomy of an idea that is clear and transparent to itself, disallowed from operating in the pure realm of ‘the spirit’; it is rooted in the materiality of the symbolised object. The Sphinx bearing a riddle, and herself, as hybrid, mired in an animal materiality, thus becomes representative of this regime of what Hegel calls the ‘unconscious symbolic’ (*Die unbewusste Symbolik*).

But Oedipus, who confronts and ostensibly defeats the Sphinx, finding the answer in ‘Man’, makes the monstrosity of unconscious symbolism vanish; consciousness of self is ‘revealed’, following the Delphic imperative (*gnôthi seauton*), above and beyond the materiality of its origin. Oedipus ‘moves beyond’ unconscious symbolism, Goux states,

[b]y making man the source of all meaning. That is why Hegel purely and simply identifies Oedipus’s response, ‘man’ (the position of an essential anthropocentrism before the alterity of the enigmatic), with the Apollonian and Socratic formula ‘know thyself’. The light of consciousness, which is consciousness of self, obliterates all enigmatic alterity, suppressing the dimension of the unconscious.

(Goux 1993 p. 165)

Goux’s term ‘suppressing’ is vital here. After Hegel his student Ludwig Feuerbach will radicalise the Oedipean posture yet further in order to absorb all transcendence and reclaim for man all that he has inappropriately transferred onto imaginary beings: ‘the *absolute dissolution of theology into anthropology*’ (Feuerbach 1843; cited in Goux 1993 p. 168). But it is not until Nietzsche that philosophy will begin to understand that its primal

Oedipean scene has been misrecognised, that its ‘tragic core [...] and the irreducible obscurity that it maintains’ have to be realised (Goux 1993 p. 171). On his descent from the mountain Zarathustra, like Feuerbach, is disabused of illusions of the divine: ‘this god whom I created was man-made and madness, like all gods! Man he was, and only a poor specimen of man and ego’ (Nietzsche 1883; cited in Goux 1993 p. 170). The father is overthrown: God is dead; man realises himself as sole creator and, thus newly inflated, becomes ‘superman’. Freed from his erstwhile attachment to the illusion of Heaven, the superman sets himself the supreme goal: the conquest of the Earth. Goux presents the analogy of this project with the full horror entailed in the extreme fulfilment of anthropocentrism in the following way: ‘the Son has killed the Father; he has used his Reason against all the Mysteries, and, having taken the Father’s place he is laying claim to mastery and possession of Matter’ (Goux 1993 p. 176). Nietzsche had said as much from the outset in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). Hegel did not take full account of the tragic character of Oedipus’ story. Nietzsche’s thought encompasses and affirms the horrific counterthrust and aftershock that is the logical consequence of that Oedipean position:

I see this insight as quite clearly present in the terrible trinity that shapes Oedipus’ fate: the man who solves the riddle of nature—of the dual natured Sphinx—must also, as his father’s murderer and his mother’s lover, transgress the sacred codes of nature.

(Nietzsche 1872 p. 47)

It is of no surprise, then, that Freud appeals to Oedipus as and when he does. It is hardly an unprecedented move. Quite the contrary; the implicit identification of Freud with Oedipus in *The Interpretation of Dreams*—his posture of riddle-solving and his postulation of the ‘daemonic’ as no more than the internal processes of the unconscious—in fact takes place in a space that is opened up by the Oedipean gesture, at least in so far as it has been

understood by philosophy since Hegel. Freud's relation to the tragic hero is thus more profound, and more complicated, than perhaps he or Ernest Jones was aware. By aligning Freud with his philosophical predecessors Goux suggests that Freud, after Nietzsche, rediscovers the horror entailed in the inaugural Oedipean gesture that was disavowed by Hegel, and re-inscribes it in terms of a dynamic and topographic logic. If consciousness of self is founded on the suppression of the Sphinx, the unconscious comes to figure the dark pulsional—parrincestual—side of that response. 'It is as if', Goux argues,

the unconscious of the human subject has taken the place—which had become collectively vacant—of modes of symbolising that had been historically surpassed, and has relocated that place in itself, on that 'other stage' where, cut off from the clear light of consciousness, those symbolizations remain active.

(p. 178)

Of course, Goux registers what he considers to be the limitation of Freud's discovery of the Oedipus complex in the latter's attribution of the castration threat to the human father rather than the monster-mother who is attested in the monomyth. For the present, however, let us simply note that we have circled back, albeit with a deeper insight, thanks to Goux, to an important statement that we cited from Cynthia Chase. She claims, we recall, that in *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud answers the riddles before him 'by discovering repression and by positing the unconscious'. Goux does not mention the dream book; he tells us, though, that 'the interplay of the conscious and the unconscious'—the eruption into consciousness of parapraxes, symptoms, dreams—is the 'continuous disappearance of the Sphinx, and her return, with the persistence of the twofold instinctual destiny that her unaccomplished murder promises and activates' (p. 178). If Freud does articulate the project of interpreting dreams along the lines of Oedipus' riddle-solving career, it is because the possibility and the necessity of that project were established by the Oedipean

posture. For this reason, and having disclosed all that Freud's Oedipean heritage had foreclosed, Goux, like Chase, tells us that '[i]t is no surprise that *Freud discovers the unconscious and the Oedipal drives at the same time*' (Chase 1986 p. 179, emphasis added).

Deprojection? The Oedipean and the Ptolemaic

Now the deprojective (Oedipean) turn ostensibly permeates, and certainly troubles, Freud's thinking in its entirety. As early as 1901 Freud proclaims that 'a large part of the mythological view of the world, which extends a long way into the most modern religions is *nothing but psychology projected into the external world*' (Freud 1901 p. 321). It is of course an insight which derives from his experiences with neurotic, hysteric and psychotic patients—whose illnesses, before the advent of psychiatry, had been attributed to daemonic possession.¹³ As Laplanche points out, Freud's book on the origin of religion *Totem and Taboo* furnishes one of the most comprehensive discussions of projection. Comprehensive precisely in that it presents us with a continuum, going from the perception of so-called bodily sensation, said to be what creates the external world, to paranoid projection (Laplanche 1999A [1992d] pp. 246-7). Laplanche takes up the moment in *Totem and Taboo* where Freud enters into a dialogue with his colleague Wilhelm Wundt on the ambivalence of the 'primitive' notion of taboo, as something that is both sacred and impure. Wundt suggests an originary concept of 'the demonic': 'the objectified fear of the "demonic" power that is believed to lie hidden in a tabooed object' which only later splits into veneration and loathing (Freud 1913 [1912-13] p. 77). Freud makes a simple and profoundly rationalist objection, however: 'Neither fear nor demons can be regarded by

psychology as “earliest” things, impervious to any attempt at discovering their antecedents. It would be another matter if demons really existed. But we know that, like gods, they are creations of the human mind’ (p. 78). For Freud, veneration and loathing are from the outset divided; the ambivalence of the signifier is secondary, for him, to an originary ambivalence of the drives (Laplanche 1999A [1992d] p. 245). The pathological process in paranoia, says Freud, makes use of the same mechanism:

Spirits and demons [...] are only projections of man’s emotional impulses. He turns his emotional cathexes into persons, he peoples the world with them and meets his internal processes again outside himself—in just the same way as that intelligent paranoiac, Schreber, found a reflection of the attachments and detachments of his libido in the vicissitudes of his confabulated ‘rays of God’.

(Freud 1913 [1912-13] p. 150)¹⁴

The deprojection of metaphysics back to metapsychology, however, is, as Laplanche has continued to demonstrate, not so much a solution to the riddle of theogeny as a displacement of the idealism that metaphysics entails. Marx had already launched an analogous attack on the Feuerbachian resolution of religious essence into human essence, on the grounds that human essence is itself not an ‘abstraction inherent in each single individual [...] but [...] the ensemble of the social relations’ (Marx 1845 p. 157). Any account of projection necessitates a description of the prior—indeed primary—insertion (or ‘implantation’) *into* the projecting subject of what it is that he comes to expel before meeting it again outside himself. Laplanche’s Copernican reading of Freud, while it explicitly operates on a different register, can nevertheless be seen as a continuation of Marx’s critique. He notes that as early as 1956 F. Pasche and M. Renard had raised an

¹³ On the homology between neurosis and religion see esp. Freud (1907)

¹⁴ Daniel Paul Schreber and the evidence of his *Memoirs* are the subject of Freud’s major treatise on psychosis (1911 [1910]). In the above citation, Freud is explicitly invoking Schreber’s hallucinogenic projections onto the outside world of a psychological crisis perceived by Freud as being purely internal. We

objection to the idealism entailed in the thought of Melanie Klein by situating projection at the origin (cited in Laplanche 1999A [1992a] p. 133). ‘Everything comes from the interior; objects, whether good or bad, only emerge [...] like rabbits or doves, from [a] magic box of tricks’ (Laplanche 1999A [1992a] p. 133); but, as we saw in the Introduction, this tendency within psychoanalysis pertains first of all to Freud. The centrifugal expulsion entailed by projection is, Laplanche points out, a process whose subject, both grammatical and real, is ‘the subject’ himself (p. 134). To deproject, to repatriate gods, demons and monsters—be they the pantheon of ‘primitive’ gods or the God of Schreber’s paranoid mind—back into the human breast is therefore to suppose the subject’s primary plenitude; to displace their originary existence to within the subject, without ever accounting for the (centripetal) movement which constitutes the projecting subject *as* subject in the first place.

Let us suggest, then, that the Copernican/Ptolemaic tension that Laplanche identifies in Freud’s thinking is in part co-ordinated by the Oedipean heritage that is traced by Goux. In order to clarify this point, let us re-cover, as rapidly as possible, and try to develop, some material familiar from the Introduction.

The radicalness of the other at the heart of Freud’s discovery, at least as Laplanche reads it, is essentially its double character. That is to say that before 1897 the unconscious is elaborated as the result of repression; it is constituted as an internal foreign body—*Das Andere*: the other thing in us which is put inside us by the (human) other: *Der Andere*.

Laplanche concedes that it is only in the most schematic way that we might wish to date Freud’s Ptolemaic going-astray (*fourvoiement*) from the letter of the equinox (21

September 1897), for both these terms will persist long after 1897, and Freud will not cease

will be returning to the question of inside/outside in relation to (ipsocentric) psychoanalytic conceptions of psychosis in chapter three.

to affirm the alien character of the unconscious (Laplanche 1999A [1992f] pp. 60-65).

After 1897, however, the dominant tendency, on the other side of Freud's Copernican advances, is to relativise the discovery: to 'reintegrate the alien' under a constant 'pressure to return to self-centredness' (Laplanche 1990A [1992f] pp. 65-66). In 1917, when Freud sets forth his claims regarding the Copernican blow to human narcissism committed by psychoanalysis, he tells us that the revolutionary discovery of his science is that 'the ego is not master in its own house'; it has been displaced by the discovery of an internal alien, whose impulsive force feels like 'a foreign invasion' (Freud 1917 pp. 141-2). But he says that psychoanalysis seeks to explain these 'uncanny' disorders by assuring the subject that:

'Nothing has entered into you from without; a part of the activity of your own mind has been withdrawn from your knowledge and from the command of your will... [Y]ou do not recognise it as a derivation of your own rejected instincts.

(p. 142-3 emphasis added)

As in his argument with Wundt, Freud's logic here is profoundly rationalist: the subject is not possessed by foreign or daemonic forces: in spite of how it feels, everything comes from the inside. But in this conception, the internal other (the unconscious), stripped of its radical alterity, becomes nothing more than the receptacle of those instincts rejected by the subject; and there is no room at all for any conception of the originary (human) other: 'nothing has entered into you from without'. At once his own Ptolemy and his own Copernicus Freud simultaneously announces the radical alterity entailed in his discovery (the subject's constitutive otherness to itself) *and* reduces it to an ultimately accessible, knowable, part of the subject.¹⁵ It is, then, crucial for us to recognise that the moment in which the subject is thus recentred, when Freud's original proposition of constitutive

¹⁵ As Laplanche points out: 'Certainly the ego is not master of its own house, but it is, after all, at home there nevertheless' (Laplanche 1999A [1992f] c p. 67).

alienness gives way to the conception of a closed, auto-centred subject, is also the moment in which the uncanny alterity of evil spirits, daemons and gods becomes rationalised, can be reduced without remainder, that is, to a projection of metapsychology which already, originarily, *belongs to* the subject. It is hardly coincidence that Freud should echo the Apolline imperative that Hegel invokes in his celebration of the triumph of Oedipean reason: ‘Turn your eyes inward, look into your own depths, learn first to *know yourself*’ (1917 p. 143, emphasis added). Everything becomes clear, knowable, reducible to an ipso-centric mechanism—and the work of a psychoanalysis becomes ‘nothing other than a process of revealing’.

We cite for a second time this passage from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which Freud compares the work of analysis to the action of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, because Freud solves the riddle of the riddle of that tragedy according to the same Ptolemaic/deprojective logic: his ‘Oedipal’ reading of Sophocles’ text is thoroughly ‘Oedipean’.

Freud tells us in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that a ‘tragedy of destiny [*Schicksalstragödie*]’ is one whose ‘tragic effect is said to lie in the contrast between the supreme will of the gods and the vain attempts of mankind to escape the evil that threatens them’ (Freud 1900, pp. 363-364). The lesson learned by the spectator of such a tragedy is one of ‘submission to a divine will and recognition of his own impotence’ (p. 364). Freud’s consistent definition of Sophocles’ play as an instance of *Schicksalstragödie*, and the role that it plays in his elaborations of the Oedipus complex, have long been noted.¹⁶ In this connection, for my part, I will simply insist on a point which was raised in the Introduction. There, we cited two crucial passages in which Freud addresses *Oedipus Tyrannus*: his first

(from October 1897) and his last (from 1938). In both, let us recall, Freud raises the question of *Schicksal* or destiny in Sophocles' text as a hypothetical objection to his interpretation, only to reassimilate it into his interpretative regime:

I have found, in my own case too, [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and now I consider it a universal event in early childhood [...] If this is so we can understand the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex*, in spite of all the objections that reason raises against the presupposition of fate; and we can understand why the later 'drama of fate' [*Schicksalsdrama*] was bound to fail so miserably. Our feelings rise against any arbitrary individual compulsion as is presupposed in *Der Ahnfrau* and the like; but the Greek legend seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he has felt traces of it in himself. Every member of the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy.

(Freud 1985 p. 272)

[The] essential substance [of the Oedipus complex] is to be found in the Greek legend of King Oedipus, which has fortunately been preserved for us by a great dramatist [...] The ignorance of Oedipus is a legitimate representation of the unconscious state into which, for adults, the whole experience has fallen; and the coercive power of the oracle, which makes or should make the hero innocent, is a recognition of the inevitability of the fate [*Schicksal*] which has condemned every son to live through the Oedipus complex.

(1940 [1938] pp. 422-427)

As we know, each of these passages articulates the interpretation of *Oedipus* in a space which definitively does not pertain to seduction: the first, since it emerges less than a month after the letter of the equinox; the second, since Freud speaks of the play only in relation to the Oedipus complex—a factor of infantile life to which, he has already claimed, 'a higher degree of significance' attaches (1940 [1938] p. 422). And both passages follow the same movement: the tragedy of Oedipus appears to reveal something about childhood sexuality in general; there is an objection—that Oedipus acts against his manifest intentions, that it is not *his* desire but the *alien* desire of the oracle that he fulfils; but, Freud insists, we can

¹⁶ See Starobinski (1967); Bronfen (1995) p. 12; Winter (1999) pp. 55-59.

make sense of this because the ‘fate’ that drives him is only a *manifestation of unconscious desire* (one that is general, common to everyone). In Freud’s response to the objection we can of course recognise the very posture which Goux calls deprojection—the external, supernatural force which manifestly drives Oedipus is in fact no more than a figure for something that is already and only within the hero’s own mind.

Thus for Freud the Sophoclean tragedy becomes assimilable to the Oedipus complex only insofar as the totality of what drives the hero ‘from the outside’ can be reduced to ‘internal pressure’. I stress, with and after Freud, that the tragedy of Oedipus and the complex that bears his name appear within Freud’s writing in the manifest absence of the seduction theory for two reasons. Firstly, because the deprojection of fate and the oracle which Freud’s reading necessitates, signifies a totalising gesture on his part, which a theory of the unconscious based principally on repression (rather than a preformed sexual constitution or an innate id) will not tolerate. If *Oedipus Tyrannus* so moves us, Freud claims, it is because it seizes on a compulsion that ‘Every member of the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy’. Fate and the oracle, in the tragedy, constitute the distorted register not simply of Oedipus’ or of Sophocles’ unconscious but of ‘*the* unconscious’—a universal, transindividual dimension.¹⁷ Secondly, because in Freud’s own accounts of the evolution of his thought he does not hesitate to concede that his interpretation of the Oedipus play was preceded by a reinterpretation of the subject in a parallel manner. In his

¹⁷ This totalising move carries its own aporias as to how it is that Freud conceptualises the role of unconscious desire in the process of composition. For at no point does he decide whether what makes Sophocles’ hero representative of adult desire is Oedipus’ *ignorance* or *Oedipus’* ignorance. That is to say: Freud’s solution to his own hypothetical objection consistently leaves us wondering, does this ‘distortion’ belong to the *êthos* of the hero—as if he were a being with his own psychological make up, or is it a function of the prior arrangement of the *muthos*, out of which Oedipus emerges, himself uncontaminated by the repression which characterises ‘human’ adults of whose unconscious desire he becomes representative after the fact? For two answers to this question, both radically opposed, yet both authorised by Freud’s account of the play, see Vernant (1988b), and Starobinski (1967).

Autobiographical Study (1925 [1924]) he tells us of the ‘error’ into which he once fell as a result of having believed the stories of seduction told to him in analysis. At last he was ‘obliged to recognize that these scenes of seduction had never taken place and that they were only fantasies which my patients had made up’:

When I had pulled myself together I was able to draw the right conclusions from my discovery: namely, that the neurotic symptoms were not related directly to actual events but to wishful fantasies, and that as far as the neurosis was concerned psychical reality was of far more importance than material reality [...] I had in fact stumbled for the first time on the *Oedipus complex*.

(pp. 217-8)

In this oversimplification of the shifts which took place in 1897 Freud states his ‘error’ as having been one of ‘imputing to the “outside” something that concerns the “inside”’ (Laplanche and Pontalis 1964 p. 9). According to Freud (retrospectively at least), the seduction scenes recounted by neurotics are no more than the defensive and projective distortions of the positive component of the Oedipus complex: nothing has entered into them from without.

Freud’s Ptolemaic going-astray (*fourvoiement*), then, both facilitates and is facilitated by the Oedipean posture of deprojection that he unabashedly takes on in the name of scientific reason. *Yet the reduction of fate to the unconscious made in the service of solving the riddle of the riddle of Sophocles’ tragedy will succeed only in displacing the riddle elsewhere: namely, ‘back’ into the primordial constitution of the subject.* The idealism that this entails is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in Freud’s case history of Little Hans, where the patient poses a serendipitous question to his father after Freud has

introduced the notion of the Oedipus complex into his analysis: ‘Does the Professor talk to God, as he can tell all this beforehand?’ (Freud 1909a p. 204).¹⁸

The reality of the message: a child is being beaten

If we are to move beyond this idealism, however, and re-approach *Oedipus Tyrannus* from a renewed psychoanalytic perspective, we must be prepared to ‘put to work’ the category of psychical reality in which Freud, in the *Autobiographical Study*, situates ‘wishful fantasies’. In that text, it is called upon not, as it might be, to disrupt the opposition of fantasy/reality, but to shore it up in the service of explaining the subjectively-experienced power of fiction or fantasy *as against* the force of material reality. Laplanche’s reworking of this third category, in relation to his theory of the enigmatic message, opens up a perspective from which to see outside the Ptolemaic-deprojective logic which governs Freud’s reinterpretation of the subject after 1897, and his corresponding approach to Sophocles’ ‘tragedy of destiny’.

In his paper ‘Between Determinism and Hermeneutics: A Restatement of the Problem’ (1999A [1992b]) Laplanche returns to Freud’s famous work on masochistic fantasies ‘A Child is Being Beaten’ (1919a). Here Freud attempts to account for the vicissitudes entailed in the sexual fantasy brought to analysis by several patients in whom the Oedipal attachment to the father had developed into an adult perversion. It can be summed up, at least in the final form that it takes, as ‘a child is being beaten’. The fantasising child’s role at this stage is simply that of ‘looking on’ (1919a p. 186). This is, however, only the third stage in a complexly developed series which Freud attempts to break down into the following schematic sequence:

¹⁸ Cf. Laplanche (1999A [1992b]) d p. 160.

- 1) My father is beating a child (a little brother or sister)
- 2) I am being beaten by my father
- 3) A child is being beaten (I am probably looking on).

Only phases one and three are directly accessible to consciousness. The second phase, ‘the most important and momentous of all’, Freud says, is inaccessible—an unconscious fantasy which ‘has never succeeded in becoming conscious. It is a construction of analysis, but is no less a necessity on that account’ (p. 185). As to the first stage Freud ‘hesitate[s]’ to call it a fantasy and inclines towards deeming it real: ‘It is perhaps rather a question of recollections of events which have been witnessed, or of desires that have arisen on various occasions’ (p. 185). This real scene is variable in its details, and perhaps because of this, bears witness to having been lived.

Laplanche concentrates on the *relation between* the first two scenes. Crucially, he notes that Freud calls the second scene an ‘original fantasy’ (*ursprüngliche Phantasie*). This term shows that for Freud fantasy proper only begins with the second scene, but also that it works against the conception of primal fantasies based on a transindividual heritage: ‘An unconscious fantasy may thus be ‘*original*’ without ceasing to be the product of an individual process and without any need to refer to the archetypal and the unconscious of the species’ (Laplanche 1999A [1992b] p. 156). This discovery allows Laplanche to return to the additions with which Freud elaborates the description of the first scene. Freud tells us that here the child being beaten is usually a little brother or sister whom the fantasising child hates. He therefore reformulates the first phase as: My father is beating a child (brother-or-sister)/whom I hate/he loves only me’. Thus contrary to Freud’s attempt to situate the first phase as the recollection of material reality, it is clear that the real events that have taken place between the family protagonists are something quite different from

material sequences. ‘If a little brother or sister is being beaten in the presence of the child’, Laplanche avers, ‘it is not like beating an egg-white in the kitchen’ (p. 156). The beating scene is *presented* to the child; the father is addressing himself to the spectator. ‘My father is beating a child/*whom I hate/he loves only me*’: These elaborative elements are not simply factual or perceptual components of the scene. ‘We are perfectly safe in proposing’, Laplanche says, ‘that [they] constitute [...] an interpretation or, more precisely, a *translation*, made in the past by the child and reconstructed in the analysis: [...] My father is beating [in front of me] the child [little brother-or-sister] whom I hate. “It means [*das heisst*]: My father does not love this other child, he loves only me” (Freud 1919 p. 187)’ (Laplanche 1999A [1992b] p. 157).

For Laplanche, the term ‘interpretation’ ‘lends itself too readily to the facile explanations of hermeneutics’; whereas ‘translation’ facilitates the notion of the (enigmatic) message: ‘What is translated, specifically, is not a natural, or even an historical sign, but a message, a signifier or a sequence of signifiers. In order for there to be a translation, someone must have meant something’ (Laplanche 1999A [1992b] p. 157). If psychoanalysis lost the structure of transmission after the abandonment of the seduction theory it is because ‘psychoanalysis with and since Freud has omitted to note that repression and the unconscious exist in the other before being present in the child’ (p. 158). This blindness, Laplanche points out elsewhere, leads to the striking implication in all of Freud’s case histories that the fathers of Freud’s patients ‘have no unconscious’: ‘At the origin of the Oedipus complex [as Freud describes it] there is no Oedipus complex’ (Laplanche 1999A [1992b] p. 190. The act of, say, beating one child in front of another is culturally and unconsciously freighted, primarily on the side of the father who is doing the

beating. He may mean to say ‘Disobedient children must be punished’ or ‘you [the onlooking child] are better behaved than he is...’; but, Laplanche suggests, he ‘barely knows that he means something like “spare the rod and spoil the child”’¹⁹—an ambiguous phrase in which the poles of loving and punishing merge, and behind which Laplanche finds deeper sado-masochistic messages: ‘Loving means beating, sexually assaulting, having intercourse with...’ (1999A [1992b] p. 190). The child may translate this message as ‘My father does not love this other child, he loves only me’. But the obscure sado-masochistic aspect of the message is lost; and it is this failure of translation that forms the (inaccessible) unconscious fantasy. The sexual significance of beating is therefore not generated spontaneously out of guilt and regression in the child’s unconscious, but is already at work in the unconscious (*Das Andere*) of the beating father (*Der Andere*): in the other of the other.

What is, for us, vital in Laplanche’s reading of fantasy is that with this conceptualisation of the psychical production of a remainder in the subject he simultaneously reactivates Freud’s notion of psychical reality and the structure of transmission that was relinquished with the seduction schema. Psychical reality, in Laplanche’s reworking of Freud, describes the nature and the effects of the other’s *message*. This latter is not, for its originator, reducible to its consciously intended meaning, but compromised in relation to the originator’s otherness to himself. For its recipient, this enigma is necessarily subject to translation and elaboration, such that the fantasies which it provokes, while they may relate to the witnessing or experience of a material event, are in their turn not reducible to its pure materiality.

¹⁹ In French: *Qui aime bien, chatie bien*: who loves well punishes well.

It follows, then, that the work of an analysis cannot be reduced to a ‘process of revealing’. For it can only entail a ‘reconstruction’ which ‘relates to something other than a history of pure events’ (Laplanche 1999A [1992b] p. 163). Analysis, as was said in the Introduction, must consist in the *reconstruction* of a process which includes the message, the attempt to translate it, and what was lost in that translation. Insisting on the importance of this task, Laplanche appeals to the Greek etymology of Freud’s enterprise: *ana-lysis*—undoing, unloosening, de-constructing; for the aim of reconstruction ‘is not to restore a more intact past [...] but to allow in turn a deconstruction of the old, insufficient partial and erroneous construction, and hence to open the way to the new translation’ (1999A [1999b] p. 163).

We have reached a kind of paradox. On the one hand, Laplanche’s thesis forces us to reconsider Goux’s claims that the unconscious and the Oedipal drives are coincident discoveries for Freud. To begin with, the very existence of the translation model as early as 1896 (Freud 1985 [1887-1904] p. 208)²⁰ bears witness to the limits of any such claim: the notion of repression at least was not absent before 1900 or even before 1897. The Oedipal drives are discovered by Freud—the external fate that compels Sophocles’ Oedipus becomes intelligible for Freud—in the period when he *reformulates* his views on the origin of symptoms, fantasies, drives, of *sexuality* in the subject, in a way which will become progressively grounded in phylogenesis, biology, and the primordial id. We have in spite of, and indeed because of, this attempted to situate Freud in terms of a specific philosophical heritage for which the riddle-solving Oedipus has stood as an inaugural figure

²⁰ That is, the important passage cited in the Introduction: ‘a failure of translation—that is what is clinically known as “repression”’.

precisely and perversely on the grounds of his transgression: Oedipus the son-husband, the parricide, the autofoundational philosopher; Oedipus who claims no heritage and who relies on his 'native wit'. On the other hand, our examination of Freud has moved in the opposite direction by attempting to retrieve from their obscurity some of those components in his thinking which Laplanche has shown must be mobilised into a schema of translation and transmission. Are we then to assume that the tragedy of Oedipus, as Freud reads it, is incompatible with the Copernican trend in Freud that Laplanche has sketched? Quite the contrary: Freud's very failure to answer the riddle (of the riddle) of Oedipus completely and without remainder discloses a great deal more about Sophocles' play and, in turn, about psychoanalysis than Freud was able fully to grasp.

Goux's deprojective turn

In order to articulate this it is necessary to make some remarks regarding one further, fundamental difference in the Oedipus myth, upon which Sophocles' text draws, from the structure of Goux's monomyth. Of the four exemplary mythemes which are entailed in the make up of the monomyth, the second is, we have noted, that the hero, having been brought up by a substitute father-king, is assigned by the latter a task or trial (which will lead to the hero's bloody confrontation with the mother-monster). Significantly, Goux elaborates this 'imposition' of a trial as being in fact no imposition at all. He notes, for instance, that in the case of Jason, Pelias asks the mono-sandalled hero what punishment he would impose on someone who had conspired against his king. Jason replies that he would send him off to retrieve the Golden Fleece; and this is what Pelias promptly orders

him to do.²¹ Similarly, it is only after everyone else has told Polydectes that the most appropriate gift for their king would be a horse that Perseus boasts of how he would fetch the head of Medusa if necessary. This then becomes the task which the king enjoins him to undertake. Thus, the young hero, says Goux, ‘indirectly and unwittingly, sets the task that will be imposed on him as if it corresponded—although without his knowledge (and initially displaced onto someone else)—to his innermost desire’ (Goux 1993 p. 13). Unlike the prohibitive role assumed by the father in psychoanalytic theory, ‘in the monomyth, authority of the paternal type [...] is not opposed to the masculine subject’s radical desire [...] it] instead allows its realisation’ (p. 43). While the monomyth, therefore, appears to be organised around the sequence matricide → marriage, the Oedipus myth is organised around the sequence parricide → incest. Oedipus, who ostensibly avoids the initiatory trial, emerges from Goux’s contrastive analysis not as the emblem of a universal pattern of desire but as a distorted, skewed version of the norm: ‘it is the monomyth (in its amply attested universality) and not the singular history of Oedipus, that contains the truth of masculine destiny and desire’ (p. 31). Freud’s formulation of the Oedipus complex—of Oedipus as a ‘representative’ of unconscious desire—would thus seem to be a monumental blunder: the elaboration of a ‘universal’ structure on the basis of a myth that in fact perverts and transgresses the normative trajectory of masculine desire.

For beneath the impulse to avoid initiation [the Oedipean impulse], there is a still more fundamental desire to be initiated, to accept the task imposed, to confront severance (death, the trial, the cutting blade that kills the monster-mother but also, painfully, frees the hero from her) in order to be reborn, delivered.

(p. 31)

²¹ Cf. Apollodorus (1992) 9.16, 108-109.

So, the Oedipean transgression is not simply a question of shifting the co-ordinates of the initiatory trial (where parricide comes to replace matricide), but, more fundamentally still, a transgression of what Goux's description of that shift presupposes: namely the masculine subject's 'fundamental desire to be initiated'.

There are two things in particular to note at this juncture. Firstly, that for Goux the hero's desire is primary. The trial in the monomyth is not so much 'imposed' on the masculine subject as initiated by him, *then* authorised by the jealous father-king. *What is constitutively absent from Oedipus is this very primary will to subjectivity which would appear to characterise the monomythic hero.* Secondly, that for Goux the fundamental figure of this male desire, and its terror, is the mother. By making the castrating father the locus of male anguish, Goux states, Freud 'unduly humanises the cause of the break; he deprives it of its prehuman, superhuman, inhuman necessity':

In this sense, although on a different level, [Freud] is behaving like Oedipus who answers the riddle of the Sphinx with the word 'man'. The initiatory adventure frees the young man from his agonising and abyssal attraction to the maternal dimension. But the hero's painful and bloody liberation [...] does not result from his father's vengeful rage. Incestuous desire is intrinsically agonising; no conventional interdiction makes it so. It is the young man's desire itself that creates, out of its own inclinations, a horrible anguish generating monster.

(p. 36)

The entire configuration of the monster in the monomyth is thus reduced to the status of a projection, and, what is more, a primary projection—one which precedes alterity, the interdiction of the other, king or father. Where Freud recognises the paternal interdiction as the locus of the law which bars incestuous desire, Goux finds 'another [interdiction] that is not paternal; and not maternal either' (p. 36). The horror of incest belongs originally to the young man, it is 'intrinsic' to his desire.

Thus, paradoxically Goux's critique of Freud's appeal to Oedipus as the pattern for human desire will lead the former's analysis to an aporetic space not dissimilar to that which is occupied by Freud's reading of *Oedipus*. Reducing the monster to a primary projection, Goux, as we know, defines the Sphinx of the Oedipus myth in the following manner:

[T]he Sphinx [is] a seductive woman and a devouring dog [... She] and not a father, is the being to whom is imputed the torture and death of the son—because of the desire she arouses. It is significant that in certain versions, the Sphinx is held to be an animal that makes young people uneasy because of the sexual relations she would seek to have with them. Here can be read the young man's desire for negative, dark, animal femininity [...]

(p. 37)

Here we can legitimately ask just whose desire is being talked about. If the young subject's desire is entirely innate ('intrinsic' to himself), then it would seem that what appeals and appals about the Sphinx ('seductive woman and devouring dog') is a simple mirroring back of the subject's own impulses (towards dangerous femininity) in a projected form. But if she is a (primary) projection, then why should she *cause* horror ('make [...] young people uneasy') '*because* of the sexual relations *she would seek* to have with them'? For surely these latter comments imply a cleavage between the hero's desire and that of the monster, and render a degree of autonomy (if not priority) to the latter—precisely insofar as her desire is shown to be in excess of that of the initiand. And might not Goux's apparent scotomisation of the role of the daimonic and monstrous other in the constitution of the subject's desire—which does not fail to register in Goux's writing—allow us to locate his thinking firmly within the Oedipean heritage that he delineates and we have attempted to take up? Oedipus may have solved the riddle of the Sphinx by deprojection, and, as Nietzsche points out, have suffered the transgressions concomitant with that philosophical

posture; and Freud may claim to solve the riddle of the riddle of *Oedipus* in the same manner (the ostensible reduction of reality to fantasy, of an alien fate to unconscious desire). But Goux, after Freud, is led to make precisely the same gesture: the reduction of primary alterity—of daimonic monstrosity—to a facet which always and already resides in the human breast. Both thinkers are led, by deprojection, to suppose a certain primary closure of the subject and to risk reducing primary alterity to no more than a centrifugal expulsion.²²

What, then, is most striking about Freud's appropriation of *Oedipus* is that the hero's appearance in his writing is coincident with his going-astray (*fourvoiement*). For at first glance it would appear that the monomyth—as it is delineated by Goux—would in fact be the more appropriate model, insofar as it explicitly entails a primary plenitude, a programme of desire that is already encoded in the subject's imagined will to subjectivity.

There are two clarificatory points to be made in this regard. Firstly, and to reiterate, Freud clearly operates within an Oedipean heritage—one in which the riddle-solving and parrincestual transgression contained in the Oedipus myth signify philosophical insight and the 'truth' of unconscious desire. But, secondly, Freud, unlike Goux, talks not of the Oedipus *myth*, but specifically of Sophocles' *tragedy*. Or more precisely, the only text to which Freud makes reference in discussing Oedipus is that of Sophocles; and when Freud does make broader references to the 'myth of Oedipus', as he often does, he never appeals

²² Marx's aforementioned critique of Feuerbach offers a particularly suggestive intervention into Goux's project since the latter, we might say, focuses on myths of patriarchy. Marx forces us to consider that if the hero's violent confrontation/initiation must entail the rejection of the maternal figure and access to heterosexual desire, then we should have to account primarily for the social relations which make this very configuration possible (and therefore for a primary—socialising—intervention from 'outside'). Such a project demands more space than is allowed by the limits of a single dissertation.

to material extraneous to that which is mobilised in Sophocles' tragic rendering.²³ I want to suggest that a certain 'truth' of desire contained in Freud's consistent, Sophoclean source can be mobilised to challenge the deprojective logic which Goux describes in the myth (and which he replicates at the level of his own argument), as well as the Ptolemaic logic which governs Freud's Oedipean approach to the play as a model of human desire.

The Sophoclean 'abandonment' of seduction

Before moving on to consider Sophocles' text in detail, a further point must be made in connection with the specificity of Freud's source material.

At least two fairly recent psychoanalytic investigations into Freud's appeal to the domain of the 'non-clinical' in shoring up his formulation of the Oedipus complex have taken a route diametrically opposed to that of Goux. Éric Toubiana (1988) and George Devereux (1988) have both taken issue with Freud's own tendency to see the Oedipus tale as the tragedy of Oedipus alone. Both have attempted to rethink both the story of Oedipus and the complex that takes his name, in terms of the determining factor played by adult behaviour in the development of infantile desire. To that extent, these two critical texts have much in common with the purposes of this dissertation.²⁴ But it is necessary to make clear a fundamental difference between the present work and the direction followed by Toubiana and Devereux. These two authors search outside Sophocles' tragedy to shore up their arguments. Both concern themselves with a tradition which posited Laius as the

²³ We must take issue with Bernard Knox's statement that Freud 'is concerned not so much with Sophocles' play as with the basic mythic material' (1957 p. 197) since Oedipus' self-blinding, which becomes so important for Freud (1919b), is specific to the Sophoclean source and not for instance mentioned in Homer.

²⁴ Indeed, Toubiana's book was written under Laplanche's own supervision.

‘inventor of pederasty’ (Devereux 1988 p. 100). Taking material from Apollodorus²⁵ and speculation regarding the lost *Oidipodeia* epic respectively, Toubiana and Devereux point to alternative versions of the Oedipus tale in which the parrincestuous child is born to Laius and Jocasta in retribution for Laius’ earlier rape of Chryssipus, son of King Pelops. In other words: for both authors, the determining factor behind the crimes of Oedipus can be shown to have been a real event of *seduction* (albeit of someone else’s child) on the part of Oedipus’ father.

I do not wish to take issue with their theses in terms of their relevance for understanding alternative versions of the Oedipus story. But the concern of the present dissertation is to comprehend from a renewed psychoanalytic perspective only those texts with which, for whatever reasons, Freud continued to be preoccupied. We are not endeavouring to pose alternative models or prototypes for existing psychoanalytic categories, but labouring to rethink the literary prototypes which already exist in Freud’s thought, and to do so on the basis of a rereading of psychoanalytic categories which has been set in motion by Laplanche.

It has been suggested elsewhere that a trilogic *Oedipus* tragedy by Aeschylus, which would have antedated Sophocles’ text, contained in its first play material relating to the seduction of Chryssipus by Laius, and the curse of an evil conception incurred thereby.²⁶ The trilogy is no longer extant and so, obviously enough, never could have been a candidate for Freud’s speculation. Our concern is not to replace one model with another, but to respect the fact that the model of the Oedipus story which Freud does attempt to understand is not a trilogic but an autonomous tragedy, and one which makes *no explicit*

²⁵ See esp. Apollodorus (1997) III. 5. 5.

²⁶ See Jebb’s editorial comments in his *Oedipus Tyrannus* translation (1895) pp. xvi-xvii.

reference whatsoever to the seduction of Chryssipus. The model from which Freud derives his information regarding Oedipus (and to which he turns so soon after his abandonment of the seduction theory) is a text whose author has first chosen not to dramatise the material event of sexual seduction by Oedipus' father.

The loss or 'abandonment' of this real seduction from Sophocles' tragedy does not, however, render impotent an approach to the play which is based upon Laplanche's reinvigoration of Freud's seduction theory. On the contrary, I suggest that Laplanche's reconceptualisation of psychical reality in relation to the enigmatic message provides an important framework in which to understand the thoroughly allogenic character of the Sophoclean Oedipus' story, and its presentation of a primary seduction in the more general, structural sense which Laplanche has conceived it. Oedipus' itinerary does not begin, in any simple way, with a sought-for encounter with the female monster that is the Sphinx. Rather, Sophocles is at pains to stress the primary, and, as we will see, double, otherness to Oedipus himself of the itinerary on which he has already embarked, and a certain *enigmatic* implantation of his destiny within him. Nothing in that itinerary—as *Sophocles dramatises it*, and as Freud thus reads (and fails to read) it—is reducible to its pure materiality. What is at stake in Sophocles' rendering of the 'Oedipal' crimes is neither a prior event of real seduction, nor the universally repressed desire of every audience member, but a more complexly presented event of other-centred, parental *transmission*.

The persistence of the daimôn

Let us first of all recognise a fundamental disjunction between Sophocles' Oedipus and the trajectory of the tragedy which bears his name. For the theological category of the

daimôn in which the Sphinx is located from the very start of the tragedy (34), is, in spite of Oedipus' intellectual victory over her years earlier, never exorcised from his existence. On the contrary: it is precisely what governs his destiny; it is the agency of *Schicksal* in the play:

Chorus: Doer of dreadful deeds, how did you bring yourself so to quench your sight? Which of the gods [*daimonôn*] set you on?

Oedipus: It was Apollo, Apollo, my friends, who accomplished these cruel sufferings of mine!

(1327-30)²⁷

The deprojective posture which Goux describes in relation to the Oedipus myth may well be an adequate definition of even the Sophoclean Oedipus' stance towards the Sphinx and her kind, but it fails to encompass the tragic orientation of Sophocles' text. The Sphinx is a *daimôn*, and we have already witnessed Oedipus' hubristic recollection of how he 'put a stop to her' with *gnomê* alone; yet his later 'cruel sufferings' relate to a daimonic force which has persisted long after his triumph of reason, and which, as we will see, antedates even his encounter with her monstrous femininity.

After Zeus and Hades, *daimôn* is the most frequently invoked divine name in Sophocles.²⁸ Yet the category of the *daimôn* is enigmatic in every way, and *Oedipus Tyrannus* engages with a remarkably broad spectrum of its possible meanings.²⁹

The daimonic signifies that sub-category of lesser deities in which the Sphinx falls, and it is in this connection that the word first appears in the text. But that is not—is

²⁷ This notoriously complex passage concerning the question of Oedipus' agency and the will of the *daimôn* will shortly be taken up in more detail, and in relation to the difficult question of the self-blinding.

²⁸ Budelmann (2000) p. 143.

²⁹ We cannot possibly hope to give an exhaustive definition of the daimonic in Greek theology. The present section is concerned only with the function of *daimôn* in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. More general accounts (not all of which are in agreement with one another) can be found in: Budelmann (2000) p. 143-54 and 166-8; Burkert (1977) pp. 179-82 and 329-332; Dodds (1951) pp. 39-43; and Mikalson (1991) pp. 22-9. A somewhat reductive psychoanalytic account, based on the work of Jung and Rollo May, can be found in Diamond (1996) pp. 165 ff. and *passim*.

precisely not—the limit of its coverage. As the play progresses, the significance of the term becomes deeper and more sinister. The daimonic, says Walter Burkert, ‘is the *veiled countenance* of divine activity’ (Burkert 1977 p. 180, emphasis added). Daimonic action is not the direct and independent action of a god *towards* the terrestrial world, but a god *working through* human existence in ways that cannot be understood.³⁰ It is an *occult* force: occluded and occlusive; the term invoked when a protagonist is led on by a force which does not seem proper to him and which cannot be identified in the moment of action. It may imply the influence of a particular god, but one which cannot be recognised as such, except *belatedly*. Thus, midway through the text, it will be called upon again: this time to signify the ‘cruel deity’ whose actions the still ignorant Oedipus envisages behind his murder of the apparently unknown old man on the road from Thebes (828-9). It will subsequently designate the strange force which guides Oedipus in his fury into Jocasta’s bedchamber to reveal her hanging by a rope (1258-9). As we will soon see, daimonic activity is suggested by Sophocles to have been present in both the acts which precipitate Oedipus’ tragedy—parricide and incest; until at last, in the passage cited above, a blinded and condemned Oedipus will identify this determining ‘other’ force with the god Apollo.

The *tragedy* of Oedipus is, precisely, this belated *anagorisis*. Paradoxically, Sophocles’ version of the myth—the very version which Freud clings to in his exposition of the Oedipus complex—is entirely about the *failure* of its principal protagonist to affirm himself as the source and origin of his own destiny. The play anticipates, presupposes, the deprojective posture (of Oedipus the riddle-solver, and thus of Freud, in his turn) and its trajectory is directed towards insisting on the tragic inadequacy of the Oedipean posture.

³⁰ We will be returning to this point later on.

Let us therefore take up the play in order to witness more exactly how this proleptic Sophoclean challenge to Oedipean reductiveness operates. Our reading will be governed by an insistence (Sophocles' insistence) on what I earlier described as the double otherness of Oedipus to himself in his tragic itinerary: on the one hand, I wish to stress the fact that it is incited and provoked by a thoroughly alien force which is the *daimôn* Oedipus will ultimately identify with the will of Apollo; on the other, I wish to stress the very human means of provocation by which its agency is transmitted to him.

Returning to Oedipus

When Jocasta attempts to assuage Oedipus' anxieties concerning Tiresias's prophetic intimations of what will soon be 'revealed', she relates the ostensibly false prophecy that came years ago from Delphi warning Laius of his fated end:

An oracle came to Laius once, I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his servants, saying that it would be his fate to die at the hands of the son [*auton...moira pros paidos thanein*] who should be the child of him and me. And he [...] was murdered one day by robbers at the place where three roads meet.

(711-6)

If the tragic action of the play is focused on Oedipus, Jocasta's statement nevertheless forbids us to confine the fate that it plays out to Oedipus alone, and therefore from any simple reduction of Apollo's oracle to the unconscious parrincestual desire of the son. If the Oedipus myth is one of initiatory passage (perverse or otherwise), then Sophocles' rendering does not fail to maintain as subject to Laius' own fate (and not just as the object of Oedipus') the perspective of the father-king whom the hero succeeds. Although, towards the end of the play, the newly blinded parricide emerges from the house of his father and tells the Chorus that the *daimôn* which set him on (1328) is Apollo, it is insufficient to say,

as R.W.B. Burton does, that Apollo's dominion has existed 'from the moment when [Oedipus] first consulted the Delphic oracle [...] (787-93)' (Burton 1980 p. 142). Jocasta's speech, in spite of her intentions, serves to inform us that the *daimôn* was at work long before Oedipus' birth. It is Laius, first and foremost, to whom the oracle comes; it is *his* fate, his portion, his *moira*, to die at the hands of his son, before, as it were, it becomes Oedipus' to be a parricide.

From the beginning of the play with Oedipus' first paternal address to the people of Cadmus (*ô tekna, Kadmou tou palai nea trophê*) Sophocles' text works to establish an ironic opposition between Oedipus the self-made autodidact—the *tyrannus* rather than the natural heir to the throne of Laius—and the other figures onstage who are genealogically and topographically 'at home'. Unlike Oedipus the runaway (and, as he will discover, the outcast) those he addresses have been reared, nurtured (*trophê*) in Thebes. Oedipus himself invokes this term when, angry at Tiresias, he calls him a traitor to the *polis*: 'What you say is neither lawful nor friendly to this city, which reared (*ethrepse*, from *trephô*) you, since you are withholding this message' (322-3). Tiresias, the Chorus of Theban elders, Jocasta, Creon, ultimately the old shepherd brought up in Laius' house (*oikoi trapheis*, 1123): 'fatherless' Oedipus will become surrounded by figures of a community and a continuity to which he is ostensibly other but tragically integral—a community which already, and without knowing it, shelters the truth.³¹ Oedipus stands over and above it as the foreigner who seems to be the 'first of men [...] in dealing with higher powers [*daimones*]' (34)—and he is implored by the Priest to 'be the same now' in the murder investigation, which constitutes the action of the play, as he was in his individual encounter with the Sphinx (53). The discovery of his real relation to daimonic intervention is the essence of the play's

action;³² but this discovery is also coincident with the realisation of Oedipus' true heritage—his original place in the *polis* and the very *oikos* to which he thinks he is an alien. The discovery of parrincest is equally, and necessarily, the discovery of his parentage. If he is to progress along 'the track' to identify the murderer of Laius, he tells the Chorus, he will need 'some link [*symbolon*] with [the Cadmean people]' (220). This link, this *symbolon*, will take the form of the marks on his feet; they will constitute the token of recognition that leads to the solution of this riddle, the riddle of his own familial identity—the paternal inscription from which he takes his name (*oidein* – *pous* = swell foot)—and the consequent irony of his reputation as the one who solved the riddle of the Sphinx (*Oida* – *pous* = know foot).

The connection between the riddles of the murder and of the Sphinx is complex. Charles Segal (1981), goes so far as to say that during the course of the tragedy (during the course of the investigation, therefore) Oedipus 'live[s] out [...] in his own life the riddle of the Sphinx' (p. 246). Indéed, let us recall Tiresias' warning to Oedipus 'This day shall be your parent and your destroyer' (358). In discovering the identity of the murderer Oedipus is as it were reborn into what is the same thing: the discovery of his own identity. We witness him progress from *dipous* (as man and king) to *tetrapous* (retrospectively, as he recognises himself the child on Cithaeron) to *tripous* (as the prematurely aged outcast, guided by a blind man's stick). The investigation enacts the riddle of the Sphinx, but it is also involved in a peculiar and vertiginous pattern of repetition. 'Be the same now!', the Priest entreats his king, as yet unaware of the implications of his request. When Oedipus demands of Creon why no investigation had earlier been undertaken, he asks, 'What kind of

³¹ Cf. Tiresias: 'the truth I nurture (*trephô*) has strength' (356).

³² Gould (1970, trans.) 34 n.

trouble blocked [*empodôn*] you from your search' (129).³³ Creon's response is that the Sphinx diverted Thebes from things obscure (*taphanê*) to what lay at its feet (*pros posi*) (130-1). This punning reminder of the monstrous riddle (and its connection to Oedipus' name), equally anticipates the story Oedipus soon tells of his encounter with wayfarers (*hodoiporoi*, 801) at the place where three roads meet (794 ff.) and where Oedipus too was blocked by the old man. For no less than will the Sphinx, Laius blocked Oedipus' access to Thebes, and his death, as will the Sphinx's, facilitated his accession to its throne.³⁴ The murder investigation is thus a riddle that repeats for Oedipus his interpellation by the daimonic riddling Sphinx whose tyranny was, moreover, *already* a repetition of the ultimately fatal scene on the highway. 'Riddling'—as we have only provisionally satisfied ourselves with calling it—did not begin with the Sphinx, *nor, precisely, did it end with Oedipus' 'solution' (lysis (35))*...

That the Sphinx should be called a *daimôn* (34) is profoundly significant in this connection; it binds her within an associative verbal network whose significance is generated in another ironic opposition to the posturing of Oedipus. Oedipus, the self-made ruler (*tyrannos*), is, first and foremost, a man of action. '[Y]ou are not waking me from sleep' he tells the suppliant Priest (65), and goes on to insist that he has acted in the cause of the city already, invoking the verbs *dran* (do/undertake) and *prassein* (accomplish) which will come increasingly to define Oedipus' character,³⁵ in order to suggest that there is nothing passive in his make-up.³⁶ But Oedipus, the active doer and accomplisher, has

³³ This is Thomas Gould's translation: a slightly more forceful rendering of *empodôn* than Lloyd-Jones's 'prevented'.

³⁴ Cf. 445-6 where Oedipus, enraged at the riddling (*ainikta*, 439) prophecies of Tiresias, calls him an 'obstruction [*empodôn*]' to the investigation.

³⁵ *Dran*: 72, 77, 145, 235, 640, 1327, 1402. *Prassein*: 69, 287, 1403.

³⁶ Knox (1957) p. 14

finally to surrender autonomous agency to the pressure of external fate. Let us consider an earlier citation a little further:

Chorus: Doer of dreadful deeds [*ô deina drasas*], how did you bring yourself so to quench your sight? Which of the gods [*daimôn*] set you on?

Oedipus: It was Apollo, Apollo [*Apollôn...Apollôn*], my friends, who accomplished these cruel, cruel sufferings [*pathea*] of mine!

(1327-30)

In a sinister pun (*Apollôn* also means ‘Destroyer’) Oedipus the active doer thus apparently recognises that he has all along been Oedipus the passive victim of sufferings inflicted by the *daimôn* of Apollo. He has been acted *upon*: ‘who is the *daimôn* that with a *leap* longer than the longest has *sprung upon* your miserable fate [*moira*]?’ the Chorus asks (1300-2, emphasis added). ‘Ah, *daimôn*, how far have you *leapt* [*exêlou*]?’ Oedipus cries in turn (1311, emphasis added).³⁷ These verbs of the *daimôn*’s leaping and swooping down onto its victim—frequent enough in Greek tragedy³⁸—connect to and elucidate retrospectively an entire cluster of words that have signified a (divine) breaking in from the ‘outside’ long before Oedipus’ ostensible realisation of his essential passivity. Oedipus himself is led to describe what he thinks of as Laius’ fate of dying childless as the result of fortune ‘swoop[ing] at his head [*krat enêlath’ hê tuchê*]’ (264).³⁹ From the first, the plague is described as having ‘swoop[ed] [*elaunei*] upon the city’ as the *daimôn* upon Oedipus (28). As Segal (1981) points out, despite Oedipus’ prior affirmations of his autonomy, concerning the plague which blights his city there is from early on in the play an insistent invocation of imagery which ‘takes the form of the penetration of the city’s boundaries by violent outside forces’ (p. 217). When, in the Parodos (151-215), the Chorus describe the

³⁷ In this and the previous citation I preserve the term *daimôn*, rather than reproducing the English alternatives which Lloyd-Jones sees fit to introduce.

³⁸ See esp. Gould (1970, trans.) 261 n.; Jebb (1895 trans.) 1301 n.; Padel (1995) pp. 129 ff.

ravages of the plague they call upon Zeus and Apollo (200 ff.). But both appear with dangerous attributes: Zeus with his ‘lightning flashes [... and] thunderbolt’ (200); Apollo with the shafts from his ‘golden bowstring’ (206-7). When Oedipus is called the first of men in dealing with *daimones* (33-4), the noun for these encounters is *sunallagais*—more clearly rendered not in the sense of mutuality implied by Lloyd-Jones’s ‘dealings with’, but as ‘interventions’ by or ‘visitations’ caused by deities. (The term will reappear at 960 when Oedipus enquires into the cause of Polybus’s death: *ê nosou xunallagê* (‘the visit of disease’);⁴⁰ and again when the Shepherd is called in from outside the city to shed light on the investigation).⁴¹ If we say that Oedipus was interpellated by the Sphinx, it is, then, because she was not sought by Oedipus, but herself actively intervened (was an *empodôn*) in his path; he was the passive recipient of the royal mandate: ‘this royal power [...] which the city placed [*dôrêton*] in my hands [*eisecheirisen*] as a gift, though I had not asked it’ (383-5). Let us for the moment simply suggest, then, that Sophocles’ text sets in play alongside Oedipus the tyrannus’s self-fashioning autodidactic persona (the ‘Oedipean’ Oedipus, we might say) an array of words and images that seem to elevate the audience (or reader) above the hero’s rhetoric of autonomy, constantly to maintain the truth, of which Oedipus remains ignorant until the last: that his words and actions have from the first been compromised by the intentions of a daimonic force that is *alien* to him.

We use the term ‘alien’ advisedly, since Sophocles’ use of the term *daimôn* throughout the play—both literally as that which Oedipus will concede has presided over his life, and figuratively in terms of all that which actively ‘swoops down’ and interpellates

³⁹ I cite Jebb’s translation here, since it is truer to the original than Lloyd-Jones’s ‘struck down by fortune’.

⁴⁰ Jebb’s (preferable) translation.

⁴¹ ‘I who have had no dealings with [*sunallaxanta*] him’ (1110).

him—is careful and deliberate. As we will see, it comes ultimately to define the doubly other, allo-genic, character of the crimes that Oedipus commits.

It is important to recall the famous and cryptic dictum of Heraclitus, *êthos anthrôpôi daimôn* ('character is, for man, destiny/*daimôn*'). Its significance for reading Greek tragedy was first pointed out by R.P. Winnington-Ingram (1980)⁴² and has since been taken up by J.P. Vernant (1988b). For Winnington-Ingram the operations of the *daimôn* mark 'the breach between divine and human modes of existence, the frailty of man and his dependence on a god-given destiny' (p. 173). In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *daimôn* signals a certain, constitutive, ambiguity in the relationship between willed and unwilled action—one which comes to the fore most strongly in Oedipus' claim that his self-blinding is entirely his own doing (p. 177). We will return to this incident later. But let us note that both Winnington-Ingram and Vernant show that despite appearances Heraclitus' axiom is not a proto-Aristotlelian or proto-Freudian reduction of *daimôn* to an internal—psychological or 'scientific'—category, is not a simple 'deprojection' of *daimôn* to man's essential 'character'. The very syntactical symmetry of *êthos anthrôpôi daimôn* suggests a double reading which in fact disrupts and problematises the polarity of human character – divine essence that is supposed by the deprojective posture; and it is on this enigmatic specificity of the tragic *daimôn* that tragedy comes to rest:

For there to be tragedy it must be possible for the text simultaneously to imply two things: It is character in man that one calls *daimôn* and, conversely, what one calls character in man, is in reality, a *daimôn*.

(Vernant 1988b p. 37)

Thus, the divinely-appointed destiny of Oedipus comes about largely through actions on his part which spring directly from his character: it was *like* Oedipus that he must leave Corinth

to discover the truth about his birth; it was *like* Oedipus to pursue his judicial enquiries with such energy... (See Winnington-Ingram 1980 p. 177). The distinction between willed and unwilled actions does not disappear: 'both kinds of acts [are] drawn into the ambit of the operation of *daimones*' (Winnington-Ingram 1980 p. 176). The divine and human worlds interpenetrate. Crucially, for us, then, the specificity of Sophocles' tragedy resides to some extent in the fact that it at once stages the 'Oedipean' Oedipus (the fifth-century man who realises that 'gods, demons and other monsters are [...] products of the human imagination' (Goux 1993 p. 120)),⁴³ but is in its fabric constituted by signals which constantly undermine that posture—from the moment when Oedipus first realises retrospectively that he has been swept down upon by a *daimôn*, to every other moment which figures an analogous breaking in from outside.

We must however attend to a certain point that is not rendered explicit by Winnington-Ingram. Let us recall that it is when Jocasta speaks of Laius and his fate (*moira*) that she first mentions the place where the three roads meet; and that it is this topographical detail which alerts her son to the possibility that he might have been the killer (726-7, 729-30). Positioning the two descriptions of Laius' death in this manner Sophocles makes a striking gesture. The hero's description of how his father was, like the Sphinx, an impediment (*empodôn*) in his path is as follows:

And on my way I came to the regions in which you say this king met his death. And I will tell you the truth, lady! When I was walking near this meeting of the three roads, I was met by a herald and a man riding in a wagon, such as you describe; and the leader and the old man himself tried to drive [*êlaunetên*] me from the road by force. In anger I struck the driver, the man who was trying to turn me back; and when the old man saw it, he waited till I was passing his chariot, and struck me right on the

⁴² So far as I am aware this paper is the most explicit commentary on the role of the *daimôn* in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

⁴³ Cf. Goux's reading of Sophocles' explicitly tragic rendering of the Oedipus myth (1993) pp. 182 ff.

head with his double pointed goad [*meson / kara diplois kentroisi mou kathiketo*]. Yet he paid the penalty with interest [...]

(798-809)

In this description Oedipus is of course saying more than he might intend. We recognise the verb Oedipus uses to articulate the old man's attempts to 'drive' him off the road—*elaunein*—as that which was invoked in the description of the 'swooping down' of the plague upon Thebes. Indeed Laius' striking *down* [*kathiketo*]⁴⁴ at Oedipus' head recalls the 'fate' that leaps at Laius' head to leave him 'childless'. The thematic and verbal resonances of this passage work to suggest the insufficiency of referring only to the *daimôn* of Oedipus, and thereby present a radical challenge to the 'Oedipean' notion of Oedipus. The scene at the three roads occurs chronologically earlier than the encounter with the Sphinx—the latter is, we have suggested, a repetition of this encounter (she, after Laius, is a daimonic impediment in his path). And just as Oedipus is interpellated by the Sphinx, so here it is the other, the father who beats him first. Certainly when Oedipus describes the encounter his description is somewhat 'enigmatic' to Oedipus himself: he says more than he knows that he is saying, and in doing so reveals to the audience the action of the *daimôn* which compromises his proud autonomy. But his description also serves to remind us that Laius' actions are overdetermined and similarly enigmatic to *himself*: possessed by the *daimôn* he commits the very act (of attacking Oedipus) that causes his fated death at the hands of his son. Contrary to the myth of Oedipus as it is mapped out by Goux in its aberrance from the monomyth, Oedipus' act of parricide, *as it is rendered by Sophocles*, does not entail the rejection or disavowal of the heritage of the father. In Sophocles it is the very opposite: *it forms a representation*⁴⁵ *of the assumption by Oedipus (as son) of the fate*

⁴⁴ This crucial *downward* movement is unfortunately lost in Lloyd-Jones's translation.

⁴⁵ And, as we will see, a secondary one, in fact.

that marks his father. It is a radically *non*-Oedipean gesture which entails not a spontaneous act on the part of the son but his response to a prior intervention by a human other (his father) who is already—unwittingly—animated by the daimonic other within his own *êthos*.

This double otherness of Oedipus' fate, as well as its Oedipean disavowal by the *tyrannus*, will become progressively more significant throughout the tragedy. Winnington-Ingram's study focuses on the moments after Oedipus emerges blind from the palace (1297 ff.). The exchange between the king and the Chorus, as we know, concerns Oedipus' *daimôn*; and it culminates in the following notoriously problematic exchange which is worth citing once again:

Chorus: Doer of dreadful deeds, how did you bring yourself so to quench your sight? Which of the gods set you on [*tis s'epêre daimonôn*]?

Oedipus: It was Apollo, Apollo, my friends, who accomplished these cruel, cruel sufferings of mine! And no other hand struck my eyes but my own miserable hand [*epaise d'autocheir nin ou- / tis, all' egô tlamôn*]! For why did I have to see, when there was nothing I could see with pleasure?

(1327-1335)

Winnington-Ingram finds inadequate the tendency to read and translate this passage in such a way as to assume, as does Lloyd-Jones's rendering cited here, that Oedipus' reply to the Chorus makes a definitive distinction between his own agency in the acts of parrincest on the one hand, and self-blinding on the other.⁴⁶ Instead, Winnington-Ingram suggests that certainly the reiterated name of Apollo must answer the question 'what *daimôn*?', but also that "[these] sufferings of mine" cannot exclude and may primarily denote the visible suffering which dominates the scene' (1980 p. 175). 'It would', he says, 'be tidy to suppose

⁴⁶ It is, for many commentators, Winnington-Ingram says, as if Oedipus had said: 'As to my other sufferings [*ta men alla*] they were the work of Apollo, but when I struck my eyes, the responsibility was mine alone (and you are wrong to ask what *daimôn* moved me)'. Winnington-Ingram (1980) p. 175 and n. 2.

that while Apollo was responsible, through his oracle, for the earlier sufferings of Oedipus, the self-blinding was an act of independent will unmotivated by divine power. But that is not how it is seen by either Oedipus or the Chorus' (p. 175). Rather, in identifying the *daimôn* with Apollo 'Oedipus links his witting and unwitting acts, so that the self-blinding appears as the culmination of the evil destiny that has attended him since birth' (p. 35).

Now Richard Minadeo (1994) has raised the objection that when the Chorus ask 'what *daimôn*?' Oedipus' own physical agency is in any case taken for granted: 'For Oedipus to insist exclusively on such agency ['no other hand but my own...'] is therefore otiose' (p. 99). It is not so much that Minadeo contends with the notion of a divine participation in Oedipus' act of self-blinding; rather that Oedipus does not intend to include it in '[these] sufferings of mine' which he attributes to the agency of Apollo. There is thus a certain cleavage between events as they are witnessed and interpreted by the audience/reader, and as they are experienced and articulated by the hero.

Neither of these positions seems entirely inappropriate; but both perhaps miss the point that Sophocles is at pains to stress, and not least in these moments of 'revelation' in the Exodos: namely that Oedipus' fate has not in any simple way 'attended him since birth', but belongs to a larger (and *enigmatic*) destiny that has attended (the house of) Laius since much earlier. The separation that Minadeo implies between the audience's and Oedipus' experience of the self-blinding is particularly suggestive, however. For Oedipus' insistence on his own agency is not without a certain irony. '*Epaise d'autocheir viv ou- / tis, all' egô tlamôn*': 'the one who struck them with this hand is no one [*outis*] but I, in wretchedness'.⁴⁷ In these lines it is almost impossible not to hear the Cyclops of Homer who falls for Odysseus' trick name, *Outis* (IX, 366), only to be blinded by his unwelcome guest. 'No

one is killing me... [*Outis me kteinei*]!’ he calls out paradoxically, *Outis* signalling at once his intention and his inability to name the external agent of his ocular maiming (IX, 408). Sophocles’ echo turns the Cyclopean paradox inside out, as Oedipus, who fails to register his self-blinding as a suffering incurred by the *daimôn*, and instead asserts himself as the master and originator of the act, reveals nevertheless his own displaced, decentred, relation to it.⁴⁸ This ostensible moment of ‘revelation’ for Oedipus, the one in which he appears to recognise the necessity of his ‘submission to a divine will’ is thus equally and ironically a moment of *self*-centring—the assumption of the Oedipean posture of independent agency. As will Hegel and Freud after him, Oedipus invokes Apollo, to whose imperative of self-knowledge he in fact reveals himself as radically inadequate. Two further things arrest our attention in this connection. In the second speech Oedipus makes having emerged from the palace, he compares the wounding of his eyes to the pain of the crimes that he has committed: ‘Alas, alas once more! How the sting of these goads [*kentrôn*] has sunk into me together with the remembrance of my troubles!’ (1316-8). The association between the sting of memory and the sting in his eyes contains a more sinister connection which problematises Oedipus’ claim, not twenty lines later, to be the sole agent in his act of self-violence. For in describing the pins of Jocasta’s broaches as *kentra* Oedipus unwittingly recalls the ‘double-pointed goad’ with which he said the old man attacked him at the place where three roads meet (809). It is as if Oedipus’ self-blinding is already overlaid by the paternal heritage that is made so explicitly a part of the son’s fate in that parricidal scene. Moreover, and secondly, Jocasta’s description of the death of Laius, ‘his *moira*’, takes this connection back yet further chronologically: ‘he [...] was murdered one day by foreign

⁴⁸ I cite Gould’s (more literal) translation.

robbers at the place where the three roads meet; but the child's birth was not three days past when Laius fastened his ankles (*arthra podoin* = joints of his feet) and had him cast out [...] (715-9). Now when the Second Messenger emerges from the palace to tell the Chorus and the audience of the terror that has recently occurred within, he describes Oedipus' self blinding in strikingly similar terms: 'For he broke off the golden pins from [Jocasta's] raiment [...] and, lifting up his eyes, struck them [*aras epaisen arthra tôn autou kuklôn*] [...] (1270).⁴⁹ Thus, against the *tyrannus*'s continued, Oedipean, assertions of his autonomy, the fabric of Sophocles' text allows neither Oedipus' self-blinding nor, in its connection with it, the murder of the Laius, to be dissociated from this prior scene of the inscription by the father on the son's body.

The murder at the place where the three roads meet is, says Segal, 'a truly primal scene' (1981 p. 222). This is a particularly suggestive point, but also one that we would seek to clarify. In the Exodos when the wretched Oedipus makes his final call upon the three roads, his invocation of the murder is couched in terms of a fantasmatic logic, taking on, retrospectively, the characteristics one might indeed attribute to a primal scene:

O three roads, hidden glade, coppice and narrow path where three ways meet, ways that drank down my own, my father's blood shed by my hands, do you still remember what deeds you saw me do and what deeds I did [*hoi erga drasas humin eita deur' iôn hopoi eprasson authis*] when I came here? Marriage, marriage [...]

(1398-1403)

The term *authis*⁵⁰ (left untranslated by Lloyd-Jones) signals here an important identification of parricide with incest, so that neither event is reducible to its pure materiality. Oedipus calls upon the place to remember both the deeds he committed there and the deeds he

⁴⁸ Even in his final words in the play Creon will still have cause to remind Oedipus, 'Do not wish to have control in everything' (1152).

⁴⁹ On this connection see Gould (1970., trans.) 718 n., 1032 n., 1270 n.

committed ‘*once more*’ in Thebes, as if the incest were merely a re-inscription of the parricide. But the topography of the scene disrupts any sequential logic of a first then second crime, so that the murder is so to speak *already* invested with the horror of incest. Followed as it is by the cry ‘Marriage, marriage [...]’, the description of the narrow path and hidden glade is suggestively palimpsestic, representing at once the place where Oedipus assaulted his father and the place (the part of the body) where he ‘assaulted’ his mother.⁵¹ For Oedipus, retrospectively, each crime is already inscribed in the other: the sequential separation of their enactment becomes subordinate to the identical psychical horror they bear, so that both crimes come to represent and occupy for their ‘doer’ the same psychical space.

There is something bestial in the character of Laius’ attack as Oedipus *first* describes it (794 ff.). Here, the verb *elaunein*, invoked to describe Laius’ attempt to ‘drive’ Oedipus from the road (which we recognise in its connection with the plague), is appropriate for the ‘driving’ of cattle, just as the ‘double-pointed goad’ with which he strikes down on his son is an instrument more properly used for controlling beasts. Thus the savagery of the attack, recalls the ‘yoking’ of Oedipus’ ankles in Jocasta’s description shortly before:⁵²

And [Laius], as the story goes, was murdered one day by robbers at the place where the three roads meet; but the child’s birth was not three days past when Laius fastened [*enzeuxas*] his ankles and had him cast out [...]
(715-719)

We should say in addition, however, that at the close of Oedipus’ first description of the murder, the same verb recurs, and specifically in relation to his fated incest: ‘Am I not a

⁵⁰ *authis* = again, once more.

⁵¹ Gould (1970, trans.) 1398 n; and cf. 70 n.

⁵² Segal (1981) p. 222.

criminal [...] if I must leave my country [...] or else be joined [*zugênai*] in marriage with my mother [...]?’ (823-6). Thus incest, no less than the parricide which *in retrospect* will take on a fantasmatic or psychical synonymy for Oedipus, is indissociable from Laius’ initial act of violence upon his son’s body, upon the *arthra* of his feet. If we understand Oedipus’ later description of his two crimes as the invocation of a ‘primal scene’, then Sophocles’ text nevertheless forbids us from understanding them as being ‘primary’ in any simple sense. The parricide and incest in which Oedipus takes an active part are secondary in relation to the originary moment which is that of a passivity and a breaking in from the outside.

Sophocles makes a further crucial gesture in regard to this originary scene. After Oedipus has blinded himself, he begs to be exiled from Thebes and sent to Cithaeron, ‘which my mother and father, while they lived, appointed to be my tomb, so that I may get death from them who tried to kill me [*m’apôllutên*]’ (1452-4). Now the verb *apollunai* recalls Oedipus’ dark pun ‘*Apollôn [...] Apollôn*’ when he spoke of the *daimôn* as the agency behind his crimes moments before (1329). The irony of its echo rebounds not just on Oedipus but more particularly on Laius whose first violence towards his son is itself made thereby irreducible to his own (conscious) intentions—enigmatic, then, insofar as it is compromised by the agency of the *daimôn*, but, preceding the self-blinding of Oedipus (that it in part determines) committed nevertheless in the full self-confidence of his own agency. *The ‘Oedipal’ crimes are thus figured as the effect of that which comes other-wise.* That is to say that the moment of the father’s attempted murder of the child, his casting out of Oedipus from the nurture (*trephô*) of the house, is *also* the moment of Oedipus’ inscription, his ‘initiation’ as the son of his father. Sophocles’ rendering of this ‘initiation’

is such as to prohibit any notion of automatic or innate desire in the son: this first ‘encounter’ is explicitly not instigated or sought-for by Oedipus. Rather, it is inscribed as a *symbolon* on his body by a human other that is his father, who is himself already, and again explicitly, compromised by his *moira* the exigencies of which both escape and yet constitute his action.

We have reached a perspective from which to affirm the necessity of refusing to speak of a ‘riddle’ in relation to *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and insisting on the word and the concept of the *enigma*. ‘Riddling’, we have said, does not begin with the Sphinx: the *daimôn* that gets in the way of Oedipus’ feet is already a repetition of this primary encounter with the other that is the father, himself possessed by a *daimôn*, and other to himself. This maiming inscription, long before the *ainigma* of the Sphinx, was what required *lysis* (1034) by the Shepherd, whose undoing, unloosening of Oedipus’ ‘yoked’ feet paradoxically did not free him but released him into a tragedy saturated by horror. The major events in Oedipus’ itinerary—murder of the father, confrontation by the Sphinx, incest with the mother, self-blinding—everything is traceable to the father’s original maiming inscription of his son from which he takes his name.⁵³ None of these events manifests simply the philosopher’s dispensation from initiation, as Goux would have it, but rather the insistent return of a heritage to which Oedipus will remain tragically blind until the last. *Oidipous* is the ultimate ‘*ainigma*’ of the play as well as of everything in the play which, as Freud says, has already occurred before the it opens (Freud 1900 p. 363). To

⁵³ Cf. Chase’s argument (1986) that suggests the father’s primary violence towards Oedipus manifests the inscription of the parental Oedipus complex in the child. We cannot, however, accept her reduction of this moment to the Lacanian formula of the child’s being endowed with the ‘Name-of-the-Father’. Sophocles’ text makes clear that the ‘maiming’ is irreducible to a ‘naming’. The Messenger tells Oedipus that ‘it was from this occurrence that you got the name you bear’ (1036)—that the enigma of Oedipus’ identity, in other words, the *symbolon* that will ‘put him on the track’ does not come about primarily from a linguistic or ‘Symbolic’

ignore the otherness of Oedipus' fate is to be as blind as Oedipus. As Richmond Lattimore puts it: 'The riddle [sic] of the Sphinx was the mystery of man. But it was the specially private mystery of Oedipus. This—the Sphinx might have meant to him—is the mystery of you. Solve it. *Gnôthi sauton* [know thyself]' (Lattimore 1958, p. 91). The tragic irony is of course that Oedipus does not 'know':

Indeed, her *aingma* was not one for the first-comer to explain! It required prophetic skill, and you [Tiresias] were exposed as having no knowledge from the birds or from the gods. No, it was I that came, Oedipus who knew nothing [*ho mêden eidôs Oidipous*], and put a stop to her; I hit the mark by native wit, not by what I learned from birds.

(303-98)

In this passage, which we have identified already in its exemplary staging of the Oedipean posture, the irony of Oedipus' sarcastic claim, as Thomas Gould points out, rebounds bitterly on himself in the grim pun on *eidôs* ('knowing') and *oida* ('I know') that the *tyrannus* inadvertently sets in motion (1970, trans. 397 n.). As he will in the moment of his blinding, Oedipus enunciates the truth of himself—his radically decentred relation to his own acts—in a moment of arrogant Oedipean self-centring. 'Oedipus who knew nothing', signals for its speaker: 'Oedipus who knew the *ainigma* about feet (*Oida tous podas*)'. For the audience that watch his day-long passage through the stages of *dipous*, *tripous* and *tetrapous*, it signals his ignorance: not only concerning the inadequacy of his solution (*lysis*) to the Sphinx's message but to the more fundamental ignorance that this conceals, the inscription of an alien fate by an other. This Oedipean moment is already subversive of itself, productive of a certain remainder that at once escapes and constitutes the speaking subject—remains unassimilated, untranslated by him. Is there not, then, something grotesquely and tragically ironic in the final Choral speech that offers both a kind of

epitaph for Oedipus and the institutional epigraph that is inscribed on Freud's medallion and beneath his bust in Vienna? *Hos ta klein ainigmat' êidei kai kratistos ên anêp*. Is not this epitaphic pronouncement on Oedipus as he who did not divine but *knew* (*êidei*, from *oida*) the famous riddle already a profound misrecognition of the truth about Sophocles' Oedipus, an ironic reaffirmation of his Oedipean reputation which the text has insisted on forbidding? Does it not, from a Laplanchean perspective, render the translation of *ainigma* by the word 'riddle' wholly opposed to the trajectory of the play? To call the demand of the Sphinx a 'riddle' is to fail to recognise its connection to the primal intrusion by Oedipus' father—the first 'enigmatic message' that confronts the child and to which his entire life has been an ill-comprehended response.

Misrecognition and mistranslation have a central place in tragic consciousness.⁵⁴ The irony of Oedipus' claim to solving the riddle of the Sphinx resides in all that escapes him. He is already himself the incarnated truth of its irreducibility. 'The Sphinx defines man and Oedipus sequentially in the normality of his passage through the stages of life', says Segal, '[...] in answering [sic] the riddle [sic], [Oedipus] finds himself the simultaneous combination of all three stages, a monstrous abnormality' (Segal 1981 p. 248). To that extent, he says, 'For Oedipus, more than for any other Greek hero, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny' (p. 248). Yet insofar as Oedipus assumes this paradigmatic role, we should have to amend Segal's claim to say that, rather, in Sophocles' play *dramaturgy recapitulates ontogeny*. Now Thomas Gould, influenced somewhat by Freud's reading of the tragedy, has made the claim that because each spectator of *Oedipus Tyrannus* can 'discover [...] the same guilt in his own past', Sophocles engineers puns and double

and 107 n.

⁵⁴ See Goldhill (1986)

meanings in order refine the audience above the action on stage, thereby to ‘offer [...] the audience a way to escape too conscious an identification with Oedipus in his troubles’ (1970, trans. p. 175). But it is on this point, I suggest, that, before Gould, both the Chorus and Freud the Oedipean riddle-solver are led astray. For the ‘tragic irony’ of *Oedipus Tyrannus* constitutes a remarkable and self-conscious dramatic strategy on the part of its author: one which insists and, in the dramaturgical logic of the play, *reproduces* an irreducible dimension of enigma, and not the possibility of a final ‘solution’ (*lysis*). In what is called the dramatic irony of the text, when the protagonists—and most of all Oedipus—speak and act in ways whose meaning is enigmatic, and, principally, enigmatic to themselves, the *audience* is, like Oedipus from first to last, confronted with, interpellated by, those enigmas—to which it may think it already knows the solution. Yet the moment in which the audience comes to rely on its ‘superior knowledge’⁵⁵ will also be the moment of its strongest identification with *ho mêden eidôs Oidipous*—Oedipus the Oedipean, who mythically considers himself the centre and origin of his own meaning, yet in that assumption will remain consistently blind to the otherness—paternal and daimonic—of the fate that assails and constitutes him, and determines the action of the tragedy. It is as if Sophocles’ play seduces us into assuming the Oedipean posture and yet by virtue of thus presenting enigmas to us constitutes a dramatic insistence that, to paraphrase Laplanche, we have only imperfect and inadequate ways to configure what is communicated to us.⁵⁶

Insofar as the ‘Oedipal’ crimes are irreducible to only *Oedipus*’ fate, if we are not, like Oedipus, or Freud after him, to blind ourselves to primary alterity, then, the play insists, any ana-lysis that we make cannot be one that is based on the simple restoration of

⁵⁵ Pucci (1998) p. 134.

⁵⁶ Cf. Laplanche 1999A [1992b] p. 160.

the events that preceded the play as they are ‘revealed’ in the course of the investigation. The ‘radical otherness’ of which Segal speaks cannot be anchored to the ignorance of the hero alone; nor can his realisation of his crimes be regarded as the forcing of that otherness into consciousness. There is no ‘real’ seduction in the play; no material ‘bedrock’ of an event in the form which Toubiana and Devereux seek beyond it to identify. Rather, seduction, in Sophocles’ play, is present in the most general sense. As an audience we do not witness the parrincest, the ‘victory’ over the Sphinx, or Oedipus’ self blinding; they come to us, already as it were ‘reconstructed’, from the mouths of those who belong or belonged to the house of Laius—the Shepherd, Jocasta, Oedipus. To that extent they come overlaid already by the signifiers and gestures that we have tried to suggest connect them inextricably to one another and, fundamentally, to Oedipus’ first encounter on Mount Cithaeron. What is ‘revealed’ during the action of the play is something quite different from the real or material events that have taken place between the family protagonists. In speaking of *arthra*, *kentra*, swooping, yoking...they will continue to speak more than they know; something will continue to escape them, fail to be assimilated (or translated) by them, such that Oedipus’ past, as it is pieced together, remains irreducible to any non-enigmatic materiality of its events. The attempt to reduce this reconstruction to a ‘revelation’ or a forcing into consciousness is to repeat the Oedipean crime of blindness in the face of the truly ‘radical otherness’ to which it bears witness: namely the intersubjective, allo-genic, character of the Oedipal itinerary.

* * *

In concluding, I suggest that the post-1897 Freud is seduced into appropriating, assimilating *Oedipus Tyrannus* in the service of elaborating a model of human desire, on the basis of the Oedipean heritage of whose assumptions Sophocles' tragedy is already a critique. It is insufficient merely to say that the irony of Oedipus' claims to riddle-solving continues to rebound on the Freudian project, if we intend to take seriously both the specificity of Sophocles' rendering of the myth and Laplanche's rendering of Freud. If Sophocles' *Oedipus* enters Freudian theory by way of an Oedipean disavowal of its specificity—its insistence on enigma and primary alterity—it is lodged there, nonetheless, 'inscribed' in it like a foreign body, a portion of which remains unaccounted for, unmetabolised, by Freud's thought. Our return to *Oedipus* suggests that *Oedipus* is itself a proleptic meditation on and dramatisation of the necessity of non-assimilation and 'blindness'. It is to that extent that a rethinking of the tragedy must be placed alongside the Laplanchean project of rethinking the nuclear complex of psychoanalysis to which the name Oedipal is given by Freud—a project which labours to re-open the question of otherness which the Oedipean/Ptolemaic project seeks, precisely, to close down.

Chapter Two

Julius Caesar: Interpreting (Freud) with Freud and Shakespeare

It is not lived experience in general that undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context. The traumatic event is the epitome of such unassimilated experience.

Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*

In the closing pages of the final chapter of *Totem and Taboo* (1913 [1912-3]), a text which Harold Bloom has proposed might be read as a rewriting of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*,¹ Freud falls into a trap with which we are familiar. In attempting to shore up the historical reality of the jealous, tyrannical father's murder by the aggrieved sons of the primal horde, he makes a significant divergence from the stated project of the book to describe 'points of agreement between the mental lives of savages and neurotics'.² Before taking account of this, however, let us rapidly retrace some of Freud's prior steps.

By way of analogy, Freud's procedure thus far has been to approach the question of totemism in so-called primitive societies from the psychoanalytic standpoint of infantile totemism, which is to say, the emergence of specific and ambivalent animal 'phobias' in children which, in spite of the fear and hatred the child directs at the animal, manifest simultaneously a certain love towards it.³ On the issue of 'primitive' totemism, Freud gets started by identifying the homologous ambivalence which saturates the festive totem meal. The clansmen both rejoice over the killing of the totem animal and are obliged to mourn

¹ Bloom (1998) p. 108.

² This is in fact the subtitle of Freud's text.

over it as well (1913 [1912-3] pp. 201-2). He goes on to argue that the sacrificial meal is a commemorative repetition of the primal deed of tyrannicide the descriptive outline of which he borrows from Darwin. The ‘violent and jealous father’ of the primitive horde had been executed in the name of liberty for the sons (p. 202). They had certainly hated their tyrant, and yet, after the event ‘[a] sense of guilt made its appearance, which in this instance coincided with the remorse felt by the whole group’ (p. 204), and which gave to them, for the first time, ‘the concept of “crime”’ (p. 222). Totemism and the joint system of exogamy, Freud explains, arose out of a ‘deferred obedience [*Nachträglichen Gehorsams*]’ to the father: if he had been hated in life, then only after the deed was committed did their truly ‘ambivalent attitude towards the father’ make its emergence (p. 211). The ritual of the totem meal amounts at once to a festive celebration of the event which effected their liberation, and a sacred and mournful expiation of the cost it incurred. Freud will go on to demonstrate the persistence of this celebratory/expiatory procedure well beyond the provenance of prehistoric times—into monotheism, Christian religious rites and indeed, as we witnessed in the Introduction, tragic drama.

But, he warns—and this is where we started—we must not allow our methodological analogy to influence our judgement too far, for there is a considerable discrepancy between the reality experienced and reproduced by neurotics and that which pertains to ‘savages’. As to the former, what is decisive are ‘*psychical* realities and never *factual* ones’, since neurotics ‘react just as seriously to thoughts as normal people do to realities’ (p. 222). Here we see the full force of Laplanche’s claim that, Freud too easily lets the category of ‘psychical reality’ be swallowed up into a banal conception of psychological reality: however real it feels to them, material reproduced by neurotics never

³ See esp. Sandor Ferenczi’s case of little Árpád (1913).

can be relied upon as having objectively occurred, as having ever constituted 'lived experience' as such. It is in contrast to this, Freud says, that the happening of the primal event must be positioned:

primitive men actually *did* what all the evidence shows that they intended to do [...] It is no doubt true that the sharp contrast *we* make between thinking and doing is absent in both [neurotics and primitive men]. But neurotics are above all *inhibited* in their actions: with them thought is a complete substitute for the deed. Primitive men on the other hand are *uninhibited*: thought passes directly into action. With them it is rather the deed which is a substitute for the thought. And that is why, without laying claim to any finality of judgement, I think that in the case before us it may safely be assumed that 'in the beginning was the Deed'.

(p. 224)⁴

Relations within the primal family were objectively lived in the form by which neurotic patients experience them only subjectively and alloyed by fantasy. The primal father (and Freud never once complicates this depiction of him) was, literally, the tyrant in whose image the 'thought' of the modern neurotic embellishes his own father. The murder, the deed, was an event; it objectively happened in a form of which the neurotic is content merely to explore and enact in fantasy. Nothing of what Freud sets out says otherwise than that the father was brutal, tyrannical and nothing but, or that the sons bore a quite genuine and *real* grievance, and fully expected to liberate themselves by his assassination. The deed was lived, objectively experienced, before guilt, crime, 'thought' or fantasy were necessary or even possible. The parricide undertaken by the primal horde just was an uninhibited, unalloyed tyrannicide.

The focus of this Chapter is what seems to be a missed literary encounter in the Freudian oeuvre. In spite of Bloom's suggestion, Freud never mentions *Julius Caesar* in his

⁴ The closing citation is of Goethe's *Faust*, Part 1, Scene 3.

omission? By working through the tragedy in what follows, I hope finally to propose the resolute answer: yes *and* no.

Interpretation and sacrifice: Freud's 'Non vixit' dream

Before engaging Shakespeare's text in any detail, let us first of all follow what is perhaps the best-known and most suggestive of Freud's invocations of *Julius Caesar*, when, in 1900, he finds himself impelled towards it in interpreting two dreams which form a kind of diptych. What intrigues him most about the sequence, and what he calls the 'centre-point' of the two dreams (Freud 1900 p. 619), is its articulation of a Latin 'mistake'. Here is the given text of this diptych in full:⁹

I had gone to Brücke's laboratory at night, and, in response to a gentle knock on the door, I opened it to (the late) Professor Fleischl, who came in with a number of strangers and, after exchanging a few words, sat down at his table. This was followed by a second dream. My friend Fl. [Fliess] had come to Vienna unobtrusively in July. I met him in the street in conversation with my (deceased) friend P., and went with them to some place where they sat opposite each other as though they were at a small table. I sat in front at its narrow end. Fl. spoke about his sister and said that in three-quarters of an hour she was dead, and added some such words as 'that was the threshold'. As P. failed to understand him, Fl turned to me and asked how much I had told P. about his affairs. Whereupon, overcome by strange emotions, I tried to explain to Fl. that P. (could not understand anything at all, of course, because he) was not alive. But what I actually said—and I myself noticed the mistake—was, 'NON VIXIT'. I then gave P. a piercing look. Under my gaze he turned pale; his form grew indistinct and his eyes a sickly blue – and finally he melted away. I was highly delighted at this and I now realized that Ernst Fleischl, too, had been no more than an apparition, a 'revenant' ['ghost'—literally, 'one who returns']; and it seemed to me quite possible that people of that kind only existed as long as one liked and could be got rid of if someone else wished it.

(Freud 1900, pp. 548-9)

⁷ Suetonius (1957) 'Julius Caesar' 88.

⁸ Not to mention the implicit connection between the tyrannicide and the rites of the Christian religion: see Sohmer's exhaustive study (1999).

⁹ The dreams are also considered by Marjorie Garber (1987) in her reading of Shakespeare's play pp. 52-73.

The *Dramatis Personae* of the dreams reads as follows: Brücke = the famous physiologist Ernst Brücke under whose mentorship Freud began his scientific career; Fleischl = Ernst von Fleischl-Marxow, a brilliant associate of Brücke's, and an admired friend and colleague of Freud's; Fl. = Wilhelm Fliess; P. = Josef Paneth, Freud's prematurely deceased friend and his successor as demonstrator in Brücke's laboratory.¹⁰ We cannot here do full justice to the subtlety and complexity of the text with which Freud presents us;¹¹ but let us at least recall the principal points of Freud's own interpretations which emerge at two separate stages of the dream book (pp. 549-53 and 619-626). In the first portion of his analysis Freud recounts having received a remonstrative look from Brücke's 'terrible blue eyes' for having turned up late to the laboratory—a look, he says, 'by which I was reduced to nothing' (p. 550). 'No one', he goes on, 'who can remember the great man's eyes, which retained their striking beauty even in his old age, and who has ever seen him in anger, will find it difficult to picture the young sinner's emotions' (p. 550). Realising that he has appropriated the power of a killing look in the dream, Freud thus acknowledges his own death-wish against P., and dwells on the Latin parapraxis by which his triumph is registered across the table to Fliess: *Non vixit* (he did not live) instead of *Non vivit* (he is not alive). He tells us that he had taken the phrase from the inscription on the Kaiser Josef Memorial in the Imperial Palace: *Saluti patriae vixit non diu sed totus*.¹² (Here, in the word Kaiser, we recognise the first obvious reference to Caesar). Freud suggests that his hostile train of ideas had 'extracted [...] just enough [from the inscription] to imply that "this fellow has no

¹⁰ Further detail of all of these figures can be found in Gay's biography of Freud (1989). Gay also discusses the dream, pp. 33-4 and 116-7.

¹¹ For a fascinating biographical account of the diptych and what is both presented to us and obscured by Freud's analysis of it, see Schur (1972) pp. 153-171.

¹² Freud makes a further Latin slip here. The correct wording has *publicae* where Freud writes *patriae*: 'For the well-being of his country he lived not long but wholly' (1900 p. 550).

say in the matter—he isn't even alive": *Non vixit* (pp. 550-1). He goes on, however, to recall that just days before the dream he had attended the unveiling of a monument to Fleischl, and 'must have reflected (unconsciously) with regret on the fact that the premature death of my brilliant friend P. [...] had robbed him of a well-merited claim to a memorial in these same precincts' (p. 551). He therefore interprets the parapraxis as a compromise formation which satisfies contradictory currents of feeling towards his friend. The exact nature of these is only made clear in the second part of the analysis, where he explains that P., who had taken Freud's position as Brücke's demonstrator, had been impatient for promotion. P. knew, says Freud, 'that he could not expect to live long [...] and since the superior [Fleischl] was seriously ill, P.'s wish to have him out of the way might have an uglier meaning than the mere hope for the man's promotion' (p. 623). Freud thus interprets the *Non-vixit* formation as the condensation into a single phrase of the two following trains of thought: 'As he had deserved well of science I built him a memorial; but as he was guilty of an evil wish (which was expressed at the end of the dream) I annihilated him' (p. 551). By this stage of the dream book, Freud has already established a point that will not cease to define his understanding of the unconscious: namely that 'the category of contraries and contradictions [...] is simply disregarded' by it, such that two antithetical impulses can exist side by side (p. 429).¹³ Asserting that 'I must have had some model in my mind' for the contradictory currents of the *Non-vixit* formation, Freud reproduces Brutus's 'speech of self-justification' in *Julius Caesar* (p. 552): "'As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him'" (III. ii. 24-7; cited in Freud 1900 p. 552). He finds further justification for

¹³ Cf. Freud (1915) p. 190: '[in the unconscious] contrary impulses exist side by side, without cancelling each other out or diminishing each other'.

determining the Shakespearean model in the fact that the dream-thought that Fliess had come to Vienna in July had no basis in reality: ‘But the month of July was named after Julius Caesar and might therefore very well represent the allusion I wanted to the indeterminate thought of *my playing the part of Brutus*’ (Freud 1900 pp. 552, emphasis added).

Freud goes on to describe how as a child he once really had played the part of Brutus in Schiller’s *Die Räuber* (IV. v.), with his nephew John as Caesar.¹⁴ The relationship between the boys had, he states, been profoundly ambivalent, marked by inseparability as well as aggressive quarrels; and Freud goes so far as to describe John as ‘my tyrant’ (1900 p. 553). It left a determining influence on his emotional life: ‘All my friends have in a certain sense been reincarnations of this first figure [...]: they have been *revenants* [...]

(p. 662). Freud expends a good deal of time demonstrating how not only P. but Fliess and Fleischl too fit the ambivalent mould of loved and hated friends, their status as revenants—all three veritable Caesars to his Brutus.¹⁵ In spite of this, and in spite of the space Freud assigns to the diptych generally, he concedes that he is ‘incapable’ of giving a ‘complete solution’ to what he calls its ‘enigma [*Rätsel*],’¹⁶ because doing so would be ‘doing [...] what I did in the dream [...] i.e.] *sacrificing to my ambition people whom I greatly value*’ (p. 549, emphasis added). Exhaustively to interpret the sequence would somehow be to repeat the crime(s) enacted within it.

¹⁴ The play is to a certain extent a thematic reworking of *Julius Caesar* and of *Hamlet*.

¹⁵ The *Non-vixit* formation, Freud proposes, might have its roots in a childhood memory of a fight with John, after which Freud had told his father ‘I hit him ‘cos he hit me’. The German for ‘to hit’, ‘wachsen’ (pronounced like the English ‘vixen’), suggests the bridge from *vivit* to *vixit* (1900 p. 553).

¹⁶ Strachey translates *Rätsel* as ‘conundrums’. I reject that translation here on the basis of Laplanche’s own consistent, and conceptually significant rendering of *Rätsel* as ‘enigma’. See Laplanche 1999A [1992d] p. 254.

If we cannot finally know what it is that Freud misses out from his interpretation deliberately, we can at least point to what seems like a significant omission. As well as the *Non-vixit* slip, the interpretation carries its own more general ‘slip’ of sorts. Freud only ever speaks of ‘the dream’ in the singular. Once he has established the apparent origin of the motif of the killing look, he appears to dispense altogether with the first portion of the sequence. It never occurs to him to return to or interpret it in any detail. Nothing else at all in relation to the dream-text is said of the stern father figure Brücke. A peculiar omission, for while Brücke is not present as such in the second portion, he is far from being absent. His ghostly presence inhabits the entirety of the section in which Freud recognises that his ‘Caesars’ are all revenants.

It does so, however, in two contradictory ways. Firstly, although Freud himself does not acknowledge the point, he tells us enough of Brücke for us to place him in the category of loved/hated acquaintances: he is a ‘great man’, of Freud’s respect for whom we are in little doubt; though he had nonetheless rebuked his young assistant, and it patently had an impact upon him.¹⁷ Moreover, the actions of P. and Fliess in the second dream (and Freud also fails to acknowledge this) exactly replicate those of Brücke in the first: a conversational exchange followed by their sitting down at a table; though where the second dream continues and the dreamer directs his fatal glance, the first dream cuts off. Does it not, then, seem as though Brücke is the fifth of Freud’s Caesars? Yes as well as no. For, secondly, it is with the eyes of Brücke that he makes himself a Brutus and vanquishes P. Between the two dreams, where the first cuts off and the second begins, there is, as it were, a ‘missing’ scene which continues to be missed in the interpretations. By the second dream

¹⁷ Freud does not only not acknowledge the point: it remains concealed behind the fact, true as it may be, that his death-wish against P. is in part determined by P.’s own possible death-wish against Brücke.

Freud has appropriated the power of the killing gaze; Brücke has, in other words, already been ‘*got rid of*’. This Caesar is *already dead*; and it is not, perhaps, excessive to hear a testament to this in the *Non-vixit* formation that gets applied to the next Caesar, P. What is omitted from the interpretations is the paradox that Brücke is *both* the victim *and* the partial model of the dreamer’s Brutean gesture.

Freud’s principal interpretative focus is the ambivalence of Shakespeare’s Brutus: a conscious contradiction between somehow loving and hating the one he assassinates, which is the unconscious truth of every affective bond.¹⁸ But beyond this there is implicit in the diptych a more extraordinary contradiction. In spite of what he says, Freud does not identify with Shakespeare’s ambivalent Brutus alone. At the moment of interpretation in which he recognises that identification (in the killing of P.) he fails to recognise that in attaining the position of Brutus by killing those about whom he feels ambivalent, he does so at the very same time *from the position of a Caesar*.

Of all the wishful acts of ‘tyrannicide’ to which Freud admits an unconscious desire in his interpretations of the diptych (of John, P., Fleischl, and Fliess), this one remains (deliberately or not) uninterpreted and thus ‘unrepeated’, an omission preserved as an enigma (*Rätsel*). Turning now to *Julius Caesar* more specifically, it will be suggested that this contradictory tyrant/tyrannicide identification, which remains a remainder in Freud’s own analyses, is strongly determined by the tragedy. Ultimately, what Freud continues to ‘miss’ in his interpretations of the diptych can be traced to the paradoxes which haunt Shakespeare’s Brutus—paradoxes which themselves open up the scope for attempting to

¹⁸ On this more general point note that Freud makes recourse to the same passage from Shakespeare in the Rat Man case (1909b), where he describes to his patient the component of unconscious hostility present in *every* affectionate relation. It emerges in the context of explaining the Rat man’s ambivalence towards his father, pp. 60-1.

understand why *Julius Caesar* appears to be such a remarkable omission from Freud's attempts to elaborate the drama of the primal tyrannicide.

From tyrannus to tyrant

What would tyranny and tyrannicide mean in *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*? The root of the English 'tyrant' returns us to, and forces us to renew questions central to the previous Chapter. For Plato, whose *Republic* (1955) furnishes the first ethical definition, the *tyrannus* is himself a parricide.¹⁹ His emergence is figured as the paradoxical upshot of the libertarian objective of democracy, itself a state of chaos which Plato expresses in terms of filiarchal revolution.²⁰ The product and the emblem of excessive liberty, the *tyrannos* will shrink neither from using violence against the true father to whom he is 'bound by ties of birth and long affection' (574c), nor, ultimately, from suppressing the very liberty that 'fathered' him politically (569a and b).

In Jean-Joseph Goux's reading of the Oedipus story (1993) it is thus in the perspective of the *Republic* that Oedipus' filiarchal, autotelic sovereignty comes into focus as the inaugural figure of modernity. For Goux, what separates Plato's philosopher-king from the *tyrannus* is that the former has undergone the qualifying trials of sovereign investiture (Goux 1993 p. 83). The disordered figure of the *tyrannus*, susceptible to incestuous and murderous passions (Plato 1955 571d), is one whose power carries no legitimacy exactly because such initiatory rituals have been circumvented:

¹⁹ This is by no means, however, the only Greek definition. Pre-Platonic attempts to make a legal distinction between the *tyrannus* and the king (*basileus* or *mounarchiê*) are to be found on Xenophon and Herodotus. The nuances of multifarious legal, moral and philosophical definitions of the Greek *tyrannos* are traced by Bushnell (1990), chapter one.

²⁰ '[I]t becomes the thing for the father and son to change places, the father standing in awe of his son, and the son neither respecting nor fearing his parents, in order to assert what he calls his independence [...]' (562e).

Oedipus succeeded all by himself, without soliciting either sacred teachings or divine help, thereby claiming he could obtain on his own what was supposed to be conferred on him only by initiatory transmission. This is why Oedipus is not a king (*anax*) but, in the Greek sense, a tyrant (*tyrannus*).

(Goux 1993 p. 83)

Goux's argument is, perhaps, overdetermined.²¹ Nonetheless, and specifically with regard to the (domesticated) Oedipean heritage of philosophy, it offers a provocative view of the *tyrannus* as a paradigm of the usurping, liberated son which inseminates Western thought (p. 87). If the parrincestuous crime of Oedipus marks the inaugural vector which will propel philosophy, it is committed in and as the embodiment of the autonomous *tyrannus*.

Doubtless the co-ordinates of Goux's model can be shown to retain a certain seductiveness, even beyond the provenance of classical Greece. It was to the pages of Suetonius and Tacitus that Renaissance writers turned when looking for illustrations of the horrors of despotism; and the figures that regularly turned up were Nero and Caligula—both of them parricides and both of them accused of incest.²² Already in this search for despotic exemplars, however, an important and telling move away from Goux's Oedipean conception can be detected—one which is marked by a semantic shift towards the modern notion of tyranny as a regime of brutality and egotism or *superbia*, irrespective of whether it carries the authority of legitimate succession. With the emergence of absolutism in Europe, the currency of this latter definition placed monarchists in a difficult position; for the boundary between absolute monarch and tyrant-despot was not easily, if at all, delimitable. If legitimate sovereign power was *absolutus* (literally: released, free from

²¹ While Goux's claim carries considerable *interpretative* force with regard to the Platonic text whose principal repudiation of the *tyrannus* is made on the grounds of his being subject to the tyranny of his own passions (cf. Plato (1955) 579c), it is not until Aristotle that the failure of proper investiture (in the sense of succession or election) is fully and explicitly conceived as the constitutive mark of tyranny per se.

²² See Bushnell (1990) pp. 29 ff.

external control) it risked identification with the very term against which true kingship had traditionally sought to constitute and assert itself.²³ It therefore suited monarchists to affirm the political and theological duty of subjects patiently to endure the reign of tyrannical despots.²⁴ This amounted to a marked shift, at a discursive level at least, whereby the signifier of the wicked filiarch comes to encompass the wicked patriarch.²⁵ The ideology of absolutism found its theological support in the relation of subordinate correspondence envisaged between the father as the king of the family unit and the king as a father of the state—a relation supposedly united in the metaphysics of God as king and father of humankind. And so long as the moral disposition of the sovereign was understood to be of only secondary importance to the legitimacy of his right to rule, the notion of the tyrant (as despot) had also to be assimilated into the doctrine of *Pater patriae*. Thus in the ‘Trew Law of Free Monarchies’ (1608), King James I responds on ‘Theological’ grounds to the hypothetical charge that it might be the duty of good citizens to rid the commonwealth of ‘wicked and tyrannous Kings’ who have ‘rent and [...] wounded’ it, stating that: ‘The

²³ Bushnell (chapters one and two) elegantly demonstrates that while this threat emerges with renewed vigour in Renaissance Europe it is no less legible in Herodotus and Plato—the latter being a touchstone for the many sixteenth and seventeenth century attempts, inevitably aporetic, to exorcise the spectre of tyranny from the sovereign body of rightful authority. Attempts to specify and delimit the powers of an absolute monarchy which always risks merging with its illegitimate opposite are considered by Oakley (1968) and (1998).

²⁴ Passive endurance rather than rebellion was advocated on the grounds that tyrant-despots who had legitimately acceded were the punishing scourge of God. It was thus God’s duty, not the people’s, to remove him. See W. A. Armstrong (1946) pp. 164ff.

²⁵ This is not the place to attempt a genealogy of tyranny from the Greek to the Roman period and into the Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Early modern notions of the tyrant which we are about to consider highlight, rather, a structural problem that inhabits Goux’s *model* of Oedipean subjectivity and to an extent extends the critique of Goux begun in the previous Chapter. There we attempted to emphasise the ipsocentric idealism of his conception of filiarchal revolution as being *essentially* untouched by a prior alterity, as one which reinforced and extended the very domestication of Sophocles’ version which made possible its appropriation by Freud and philosophy. The other side of this is the paradox of the affirmation and posterity of Oedipean filiarchy. If, as Goux says, ‘The autodidactic and individualistic tendency that characterises philosophical thought in its very essence is clearly inscribed in this liberation of the sons from the authority of the father and the fathers’ (Goux 1993 p. 87), then it remains true that philosophy is itself marked, ‘in its very essence’, by a *tradition* of filial repudiation. Filiarchy cannot *not* collapse back into a tradition whereby each revolutionary philosophical *tyrannus* is positioned as the father figure against whom the new son will be constrained to revolt. This issue will reappear in chapter three.

wickedness of the King can neuer make them that are ordained to be iudged by him, to become his Iudges' (p. 78). Moreover, the position which the king occupies *as* king, however 'vnruly and tyrannous' may be his regime, remains *ipso facto* a guarantee of the structural order without which the commonwealth will find itself in the alternative and more deleterious condition of anarchy:

[...] if the children may upon any pretext that can be imagined, lawfully rise vp against their Father, cut him off, & choose any other whom they please in his roome; and if the body for weale of it, may for any infirmitie that can be in the head, strike it off, then I cannot deny that the people may rebell, controll and displace, or cut off their king at their own pleasure, and vpon respects moouing them. And whether these similitudes represent better the office of a King [...] I leave [...] to the readers [sic] discretion.

(p. 78)²⁶

At a rhetorical level tyranny had officially to be repatriated into the model of true kingship, accepted as a regrettable instance of what monarchy always-might-be. So forceful is the pressure to acknowledge this concession that even when James I does approach the question of the 'vsurping Tyran [sic]' in *Basilikon Doron* (1598) his illegitimacy is figured as an illegitimate *paternity*: he is a 'step-father', to depose whom thus remains a rebellion 'euer vnlawful' (p. 20-21).

But the antithesis on which contemporary monarchical texts like James's depend, namely that between monarchy and anarchy, implicitly concedes and upholds a much firmer structural identification between king and tyrant. As Catherine Belsey (1985) has observed, insofar as such texts represent the unity of the commonwealth (the macrocosmic family or body politic) as requiring the monarch (father or head) to rule in such a way as to

²⁶ The 'Oedipean' notion of the tyrant/*tyrannus* did not simply disappear of course. The *OED* shows the meaningful currency of both the tyrant-despot and tyrant-usurper in Shakespeare's period, and illustrates both by appeals to the Shakespearean corpus (senses 1 and 3). Whatever its vicissitudes, we are, nonetheless,

eliminate opposition, disobedience and thus anarchic dissolution, ‘tyranny becomes not merely the shadow of absolutism but its norm’ (Belsey 1985 p. 99).²⁷ What is at stake in our shift from the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of fifth-century Athens to the *Julius Caesar* of early modern England, is a displacement of tyranny and its significance for the coming into being of ‘the subject’—and one which has been seen to emerge with particular vigour in tragedy. The normative tyranny of absolute rule provided an endless narrative resource for early modern drama. Yet tragedy situates itself not as a simple expression of the unity of the commonwealth, but rather, as both Belsey and Franco Moretti (1988) have argued, as an articulation of and challenge to the *opposition between* ‘sovereign’ and ‘subject’ which that promise of unity was called upon by monarchist texts to efface. If the apparatus of absolute sovereignty *qua* absolute must close off sedition and resistance, then the monarch occupies a deeply ambivalent position as *both the prohibitor and the model* of individual ‘freedom’. In representing (and thus itself replicating) tyranny as well as resistance to it, tragic drama can be regarded as one of the ‘intellectual origins of the English Revolution’.²⁸ The dramatisation of rebellion and tyrannicide opens up glimpses of a third way between monarchy and anarchy whereby those who rebel in accordance with their conscience and on behalf of law, are possessed of the very liberty hitherto consecrated solely in those they repudiate. When ‘subjects execute the monarch’, Belsey claims, ‘they become *subjects* in another [...] sense’ (1985 p. 223, emphasis added).²⁹

concerned with the fact of the necessary assimilation of this slippery term, as a term, into the discourse of legitimate sovereignty.

²⁷ Belsey discusses *Julius Caesar* in detail on pp. 101-3 and 116-7.

²⁸ This is a term which Richard Wilson (2002) purloins from Christopher Hill in the general introduction to his collection of various critical writings on *Julius Caesar*, p. 6.

²⁹ Cf. Moretti (1988) p. 42: ‘Tragedy disentitled the absolute monarch to all ethical and rational legitimation. Having deconsecrated the king, tragedy made it possible to decapitate him’.

In short, the shift from *tyrannus* to tyrant, at least with regard to our concerns, might be construed as a shift from filiarchal promise to paternal prohibition. If the *tyrannus* of the fifth century BC marks out the (albeit aporetic) vector of an inaugural subjectivity, the figure of the tyrant proleptically deconsecrated by early modern tragic drama is a measure of the subjectivity which the sons of the realm are constitutively denied: their liberty and autonomy is to be attained at the cost of rising up against the absolute Father, setting him on the ‘scaffold’ and cutting him off.

Famous last words: tyranny, posterity and equivocation

But given these cultural and historical co-ordinates regarding the ‘work’ of early modern tragedy, to what extent *is* Shakespeare’s text reducible to them?

In Plutarch’s *Lives*, which contain the principal sources of *Julius Caesar*, a cruel if not, perhaps, deliberate irony marks the moment of Brutus’ death at Philippi. His final words, after military defeat and moments before his suicide, are reported thus by Plutarch: ‘[A]s for me, I think myself happier than they that have overcome [i.e. the triumvirate], considering that I leave [*apoleiponta*] a perpetual fame of our courage and manhood, the which our enemies the conquerors shall never attain unto [...]’ (North’s *Brutus* pp. 189-90; Plutarch, *Brutus*, LII. 3). Events, Brutus believes, will speak for themselves; his own posterity will therefore remain unequivocal. His courage and manhood, affirmed at this moment immediately in advance of his passing, are his legacy, that which he *leaves* or bequeaths. Yet no sooner has he staked this claim to secure perpetually his own posterity, than he becomes radically dispossessed of his own narrative. Plutarch goes on: ‘He came as near to [Strato] as he could, and taking his sword by the hilts with both his hands, and

falling down upon the point of it, ran himself through' (North's *Brutus* p. 190). Not least of all the detail of this account confers an appearance of certainty on the manner of his death. But in the next sentence, Brutus is upright once again, and ready to die differently and in equal detail: 'Others say that not he, but Strato (at his request) held the sword in his hand, and turned his head aside: and so he ran himself through, and died presently' (p. 190). Retrospectively, Brutus' last words already begin to look threatened. The event of his death is not secure, not unequivocal; how then can the events of his life be presumed to speak for themselves perpetually? Only a page later Plutarch invokes an extant letter allegedly written by Brutus which throws into doubt the precise means of Portia's death. It is a text, he says, which *would* challenge the accounts of Nicolaus the philosopher and Valerius Maximus. Yet the *Life* preserves this suggestion in the conditional; for it cannot be resolved, Plutarch concedes, whether or not the letter is genuine. *Eiper ara tôn gnêsiôn estin* are the final words of the *Life of Brutus* (Plutarch, *Brutus* LIII. 5).³⁰ They point not to the Roman's dream of self-authorised posterity, but to its appropriation and misappropriation in his absence; his dispossession, then, of that which he 'leaves', like a letter to be purloined or even forged.

The ironic non-closure of Plutarch's account pertains, however, not just to Brutus, but to the entire posterity of the murderous event in whose occurrence he believes his perpetual fame to have been secured. Neither his name nor Caesar's will escape the vicissitudes of incalculable (mis)appropriation. Certainly they will not have acquired a resolute and unequivocal significance or signification by the time of Shakespeare's tragedy. On the contrary, the problem of posterity in Plutarch points to the fact that the question of what tyranny and tyrannicide would mean in *Julius Caesar* is chiasmatic, and makes an

³⁰ '[...] if indeed it is a genuine [letter]'

equal and unavoidable demand to be posed contrariwise. Shakespeare's text emerges already burdened with the legacy of innumerable literary interventions in, and political and philosophical treatises on, what it is that the event of Caesar's assassination brings to 'the tyrannicide debate' of which the advent of absolutism in Europe had inaugurated such a vigorous renewal.³¹ Long in advance of Shakespeare's tragedy, the murder was a retrospective and radically unresolved point of dispute by which both tyranny and tyrannicide could be legitimated as well as condemned. If Michelangelo had already sculpted a heroic bust of the courageous and manly Brutus, Dante had already confined him, along with Judas, to the most ignominious circle of hell.³² 'Unlike Nero, Domitian, and Caligula—all universally reviled as hateful tyrants', Robert Miola argues, 'Caesar evoked the full spectrum of Renaissance opinion and so did his assassination' (1985 p. 272).

Shakespeare's text comes to us bound up with a certain performativity in regard to that event and indeed to the singularly equivocal posterity 'left' by the murder which it dramatises. Until the 1950's, critical responses to the tragedy tended to be no less polarised with regard to what could be claimed as Shakespeare's attitude to the assassination (endorsement or condemnation) than were Michelangelo and Dante to the event itself. For Dover Wilson (1964), Shakespeare's Caesar represented 'a monstrous tyrant who destroyed his country', his Brutus a noble and selfless champion of liberty whose act Shakespeare sanctioned and lauded (p. xxv). For Mark Hunter, on the other hand, there could be 'no doubt that to Shakespeare's way of thinking [...] the murder of Julius was the foulest crime

³¹ See Miola (1985), and cf. M. L. Clarke (1981).

³² Miola (1985) p. 272. Clarke (1891) points out (pp. 90-91) that Michelangelo himself was perhaps ambivalent towards Brutus and what he represented. His bust, executed on behalf of Cardinal Ridolfi, is

in secular history' (pp. 136 ff.). Only with Ernest Schanzer's (1955) attempt to fit *Julius Caesar* to the model of the so-called 'problem play' did criticism begin to confront the essential ambivalence of the text to which the very possibility of those earlier, polarised responses could not help but testify.³³ If, as Miola suggests, there is something quite specific inherent in Shakespeare's subject matter which refuses its being harnessed to an unequivocal and permanent perspective, then the same may be said for Shakespeare's dramatisation of it—at least with regard to its own critical reception. For Schanzer, the play labours to make Caesar 'remain [...] an enigma' (p. 303), such that the audience is refused an easily determinable hold on whether the conspirators' accusations of tyranny are legitimate, and thus whether the assassination is morally and politically defensible. He suggests, in short, that the tragedy works to hold open the very question of just what it is that the assassination might mean.

The crucial point here—and Schanzer's term 'enigmatic' is a fortuitous one—is that if the equivocal critical posterity of Shakespeare's play, for a time at least, replicated in its very divisiveness that which had sprung from the original murder, then it is owing to the fact that the tragedy, rather than attempting a partisan affirmation of or against the event which is its subject and its focus, *dramatises an originary complexity embedded in the event itself*.

Apoleipô: the verb with which Brutus is claimed by Plutarch to have declared the bequest of his permanent reputation is adequately rendered by North's verb 'leave',³⁴ and, against itself perhaps, begins to open up the space in which our reading of Shakespeare's

nonetheless a testament to a cult of republicanism and tyrannicide in sixteenth century Florence, which claimed Brutus as its hero.

³³ See also Fortin (1968). Schanzer takes Dover-Wilson and Hunter as merely two illustrations of the general 'polarity of views' produced by the tragedy.

text will take place. *Apoleipô* is to leave or leave behind, to hand down or pass on. Yet like North's English verb it is also to leave behind in the sense of abandoning; to omit, lose or forsake and leave to decay. It implies both preservation and dereliction, perhaps even the necessity of both as a condition for the possibility of any legacy as such.³⁵ It points to a future, an afterwardsness (*après coup*), which the verb of 'leaving' calls forth in Brutus' very act of taking his leave, but which it can neither fully programme nor exhaustively foresee. It points, that is, to the exigency of *Nachträglichkeit*. *Apoleipô* announces the bequest of something which will continue to exert some kind of effect beyond the immediate provenance of its origin. Yet, with its double or equivocal signification, *apoleipô* disallows the simply teleological or programmatic future which Brutus desires and envisages for what it is that he leaves. Strictly speaking, neither Dante's censure of Brutus and, thus, of the assassination, nor Michelangelo's valorisation of them, is proleptically disqualified by Brutus' (alleged) last words. Nor is either simply a retrospective construction. On the contrary. The duplicity of the verb—indeed of the act of 'leaving' *per se*—makes the moment of its articulation by Brutus in Plutarch's text complex and equivocal *in itself*, to a degree that cannot be perceived by Brutus, and is not perhaps by Plutarch himself.³⁶ Encapsulated embryonically in Plutarch's ambivalent term, the polemical debate—political, ethical, aesthetic—which sprung up in the wake of the assassination, and which continued to rage in Shakespeare's day, testifies to something

³⁴ Though North's is, of course, not a direct translation of the Greek but a rendering of Amyot's French.

³⁵ The paradoxical preservation by dereliction and dereliction by preservation of the legacies of the dead will be of central importance to the question of memory in chapter three.

³⁶ The objection that Plutarch's text is, of course, written 'after the event' and is a part of Brutus' legacy, and indeed the entire legacy of the assassination, changes nothing here. It merely displaces onto Plutarch's writing the fundamental point that neither the preservation of Brutus' noble reputation, nor its dereliction can be evacuated without any remainder from the attempt to confront and address it.

undecidable, or, to leap ahead somewhat, *à traduire*, concerning Caesar's death, the event itself of his assassination, by which it is, and continues to be, called forth.

In what follows I want to take up Shakespeare's tragedy, assuming a starting point from Schanzer's insistence that it is fundamentally non-partisan. I suggest that the specificity of the tragedy is to be found in its dramatic negotiation of a certain problematic with which we are already familiar from Freud. In its transposition of Plutarch's retrospective narrative into mimetic form—one which presents the 'then' as 'now'—Shakespeare's text will be seen to acknowledge its own inescapable belatedness, not simply in terms of anachronism and epistemological alienness, but as an effect of the event to which it bears dramatic witness.³⁷ I began by posing the question of why it might be that Freud should give so little attention to such an apparently 'Freudian' play as *Julius Caesar* would appear to be. In order to formulate a response to this question I suggest that what Shakespeare's text successfully 'negotiates' might be described in terms of the determinism-hermeneutics polarity which we considered in the Introduction. *Julius Caesar*, it will be seen, refuses to be assimilated to the model of anachronistic back-projection whereby the present context of its composition would impose, in terms of its own epistemological purview, a single and identifiable meaning on the past event it re-presents. Nor, however, is it a naïve archae-ological labour of presenting the ancient assassination 'as it was', complete and meaningful in itself. What will concern us in what follows is Shakespeare's articulation and dramatisation of the traumatic breach opened up in the moment of the event—the complexity of which, at the instant of its happening, is precisely

³⁷ On this mimetic point of the 'then' as the 'now', and with specific reference to the scene of the murder to which we will be returning, see esp. Bates (1999) pp. 191-2 and Goldberg (1993) p. 166-7.

what calls forth the belated, equivocal posterity which both attempts and fails to secure its significance and its meaning.

No last word(s): a failure of translation

In the midst of the so-called 'seduction scene' between Cassius and Brutus, and thus almost at the outset of the play, the text establishes its own specific relation both to that historical event and to the source texts from which Shakespeare derives the major portion of his 'raw' material.

Throughout the onstage seduction, the process of which we will come to presently, there are several audible interruptions from the offstage scene of Caesar's attempted coronation. It had seemed to Brutus and Cassius that the shouts of the plebs indicate that Caesar has been made 'king' (I. i. 79-80); yet as the festive coronation breaks up, and fully breaks into the onstage scene, the evident discomfort of Caesar and the awkwardness of his train as they pass by contradicts, though only in part, the conspirators' pessimistic assumptions. By this point we have already heard Cassius' objections to Caesar who 'Is [...] become a god' (I. ii. 116; cf. 121) and a 'colossus', under whose legs such petty men as Cassius must 'walk [...] and peep about/To find [...] dishonourable graves' (I. ii. 135-7); and we have already listened to his recollections of Caesar's moments of frailty and confessed mortality (I. ii. 111-131). But in his first extended speech, an aside to Antony regarding his suspicions of Cassius, Caesar emerges in neither one nor the other of these roles exclusively. Rather his quasi-deific stature and his quotidian frailty coexist and are so inextricable as to mark his discourse as paradoxical, even self-contradictory:

Would [Cassius] were fatter! But I fear him not:
Yet if my name were liable to fear

I do not know the man I should avoid
 So soon as that spare Cassius [...]
 Such men as he be never at heart's ease
 Whiles they behold a greater than themselves,
 And therefore are they very dangerous.
 I rather tell thee what is to be feared
 Than what I fear: for always I am Caesar.
 Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf,
 And tell me truly what thou think'st of him.

(I. ii. 197-213)

No sooner does Caesar recognise the danger posed by Cassius to his 'greater' person than the perceptive political acumen with which the recognition is made is banished as an irrelevance from the authority of his illeistic political self ('for always I am Caesar'). Caesar fears what Caesar *qua* 'Caesar' need not fear. But it is *qua* 'Caesar', the deific colossus, that Caesar has cause to fear. He is and is not afraid, is and is not the monomaniacal giant who should, and by definition cannot be, afraid. His essence, as we will see later, is affirmed in these very contradictions.

As he moves off with Mark Antony, Brutus and Cassius pull the acerbic Caska aside as their only source, and by extension ours, of an account and an explanation of what has occurred offstage and made the angry spot glow on Caesar's brow. The plebs' outcries, says Caska, coincided not with Antony's efforts to confer the coronet on Caesar, but with the latter's refusal of it; and, in the end, Caesar's 'falling sickness' (I. ii. 253) had got the better of him: he had swooned in an epileptic fit 'And so he fell' (I. ii. 267).

Three characteristics of Caska's description and what it describes deserve note. First is the theatricality by which the noisy coronation scene is marked overall. Recounting the audible participation of the plebs, 'clap[ping Caesar] and hiss[ing] him according as he pleased and displeased them', Caska is led to recall how they 'use to do' the same to 'the players in the theatre' (I. i. 257-9). Furthermore, there is little doubt in Caska's mind that

Caesar's refusals are themselves a performance, for in spite of his ostensible modesty, he says, 'he would fain have had [the coronet]' (I. ii. 238-9). The second notable trait is the blatant anachronicity entailed in Caska's report of these theatrics. There is no attempt on Shakespeare's part to achieve a sense of realistic authenticity. Instead, references to Caesar opening his 'doublet', offering his throat to be cut (I. ii. 264), and to the 'sweaty nightcaps' of his filthy audience-members (I. ii. 244) make the scene sound distinctly Elizabethan.³⁸ The third significant characteristic is the level of non-disclosure in Caska's narrative. Putting on his tardy form of frustrating evasiveness, he persistently requires prompt-questions from his interlocutors,³⁹ and, indeed, makes it clear that what he has allowed to be cajoled from him is less than the full story ('I can as well be hanged as tell the manner of it' (I. ii. 234)).⁴⁰ Most strikingly of all is Caska's response, at the end of his narrative, to Cassius' question as to whether Cicero had said anything:

Caska: Ay, he spoke Greek.

Cassius: To what effect?

Caska: Nay, an I tell you that, I'll ne'er look you in the face again. But those that understood him, smiled at one another, and shook their heads; but for mine own part, it was Greek to me.

(I. ii. 280-3)

There is no precedent in Plutarch for Cicero's having said a word. The authoritative gloss of his opinion, so desired by Cassius, is invented by Shakespeare then just not rendered. Figured as incomprehension on Caska's part ('those that understood him [...]'), this amounts to an extraordinary and tantalising refusal on Shakespeare's, who knew from Plutarch that the historical Caska was fluent in Greek.⁴¹ The last words of the offstage

³⁸ On anachronicity and the relation between *Julius Caesar* and the politics of Elizabethan theatre which it seems directly to address, see Wilson (1996).

³⁹ I. ii. 216-9, 223, 225, 230, 233, 250, 261, 275, 277, 279

⁴⁰ Cf. I. ii. 286.

⁴¹ Indeed that Caska spoke in Greek at the moment he stabbed Caesar. See North's *Caesar* p. 101.

scene remain forever untranslated. There *is* no simple *dernier mot*. Or rather, the last words spoken *during* the scene of the attempted coronation are replaced by Caska's having, as our only source of narrative, 'the last word' *on* the scene—one which is no last word, which does not secure a single and resolute perspective on the event, but rather closes his narrative in and by pointing to something inaccessible, untranslatable that emerged during the scene itself.

Let us clarify and develop this point by suggesting that if Caska does not conceal the impossibility of recounting to his friends the full truth of what has happened, if he frames his account with admissions that it is not a satisfactorily exhaustive transposition and communication of the event he has witnessed, this does not presuppose a straightforward, classical opposition between the singular meaningfulness of the event and the supplementarity of his account. On the contrary, the inadequate transposition, the failure of translation which mark his account point us to the centrifugal force of something internal to the event he recounts, which is in the first instance inadequately legible, untranslatable, enigmatic. The theatricality which defines this public performance by Antony and Caesar is fully in accordance with Plutarch, who claims that the attempted coronation of Caesar was a 'proof' (North's *Caesar*, p. 93)—a gesture designed more to test the preparedness of the plebs to see Caesar crowned than actually to confer on him the kingship which Shakespeare's Brutus and Cassius had so feared. It is thus crucial to notice that, as Caska relates it, the plebs cheer only *after* Caesar has first made his initial (engineered?) display of refusing the coronet (I. ii. 221-2). The two repetitions of its offer and its repudiation, which invoke further hooting approval from the mass, means that in its moment of obvious failure—indeed, by virtue of that failure—the theatrical effort to test

and secure the plebs' desire for Caesar's coronation transmutes itself seamlessly into a solicitation of their cheers for his (apparent) modesty. Caesar's desire, his real ambition, remains veiled, ambivalently (un)articulated by his and Antony's own theatrics. Does he desire the coronet, or does he desire to put it by? Nothing *in the spectacle of offering/repudiating alone* permits its audience to decide. The meaning, as it were, of the performance is not reducible to the material actions in which it consists. For, rather, in themselves those acts—as messages to the mass—preserve as an enigma precisely what it is that Caesar *wants*.

The significance of this unseen scene pertains to the entire tragedy and *its* audience in turn. It is unapologetically anachronistic, and blatantly theatrical. From Caska's description it sounds like a piece of Elizabethan drama—a drama, moreover, in which an inauthentically dressed Julius Caesar, in the context of his pseudo-coronation, prepares himself for the sacrificial knife, and then collapses in a morbid state. In short, it 'imports the argument of the play', as Ophelia says of the Dumbshow,⁴² and sketches out nothing less than the substance of the larger tragedy of which it is an occulted portion. It is thus telling, with regard to Shakespeare's sources, that lodged within his text is the gap opened up via Caska, in which Greek is unnecessarily invoked and left untranslated. Like Caska, Shakespeare was no translator of Greek. But then nor was Thomas North. Shakespeare's source texts are already a translation of a translation by Amyot. *Julius Caesar* is already at three removes from Plutarch's Greek. Equally like Caska, however, from whose mouth the proleptic mini-tragedy reaches Shakespeare's audience, there is no attempt in *Julius Caesar* exhaustively to transpose the entirety of, or to retrieve a truth lost in, these layers of translation—North's of Amyot, Amyot's of Plutarch, or even Plutarch's 'translation' of the

historical events themselves. Instead, the present tense in which its own (belated, anachronistic) drama operates functions to disclose the happening of events in such a way that they are shown *in the first place* to have been *not* exhaustively communicable or translatable—indeed that it is the *à traduire* of those events which demands their constant retranslation.

As we will see, not unlike the peculiar dramaturgy of *Oedipus Tyrannos*, *Julius Caesar* prohibits its audience (which includes Freud the dreamer) from occupying a privileged position of spectatorial tyranny that would enable a decisive and resolute interpretation of what is reproduced—repeated and, as we will see, translated—before them. Rather than attempting naïvely to dramatise its principal protagonists in their original ‘essence’, it labours to present their essence, and thus the murderous event to which they give rise, as being originarily complex. The question of Caesar’s enigmatic desire—his ‘ambition’ or his modesty—during the pseudo-coronation will remain a bone of contention for the characters on stage even after the funeral orations in which it is explicitly re-invoked and understood in wholly contrasting ways, though neither of them wholly illegitimate, by Antony and Brutus. By then, however, nothing will have permitted Shakespeare’s audience to have the last word on Caesar’s alleged tyranny or the true character of his tyrannical desire. In short, and in contrast with Freud’s description of the primal murder, it will have been impossible to say whether or not a tyrannicide, in the strictest sense, has occurred.

⁴² *Hamlet* III. ii. 136.

Interpreting Shakespeare with Shakespeare

As Freud recognises with regard to his dream, interpretation can entail sacrifice. What we have called spectatorial tyranny with regard to *Julius Caesar* would describe the hubristic posture of determining one way *or* another precisely *what is at stake* in what is on stage. To assert that the tragedy denies such a posture is not to say that what does happen either lends itself to random interpretation, or defies reading altogether; rather that the attempt to claim a ‘single’ and ‘resolute’ interpretation amounts to a sacrificing of the complexity of what is interpreted. Before considering in more detail the possibility of an interpretation of *Julius Caesar*, and its connection with the reading Freud gives of his dream, let us, then, turn to the function of interpretation *within* the play, and the path it marks out for its would-be interpretative spectator.

The play is freighted heavily with interpretation, with readings—of people, their corpses, strange phenomena, dreams, prophecies, wounds... Everything lends itself to be read. Even Caesar’s sacrificial ox, whose incomplete entrails beggar an exhaustive reading, does not for its lack of a heart cease to operate as a message, a sign (II. ii. 37-43).⁴³ The most explicit statement concerning interpretation comes from, of all characters, Cicero, as part of his only unmediated dialogue in the play. Meeting a petrified Caska on the night before the murder, he listens to his friend’s catalogue of the evening’s prodigious horrors: the surly, harmless lion, men ‘all in fire’ yet unscorched, the hooting of the night bird at noon (I. iii. 15-28). ‘When these prodigies/Do so conjointly meet’, says Caska,

Let not men say
‘These are their reasons, they are natural’:

⁴³ Cf. Wolfreys (2000) p. x.

For I believe they are portentous things
Unto the climate they point upon

(I. iii. 28-32)

Something threatens. As Laplanche has pointed out (1999A [1995]), one must always be careful to distinguish between a pure and a non-objective threat. Freud, he notes, consistently uses two different words, *Drohung* and *Androhung* respectively, the latter implying a spoken threat, one addressed by someone to someone. ‘A pure threat’, Laplanche suggests, ‘is objective: a storm threatens, unless, of course, we posit a Jupiter brandishing bolts of lightening; but then, precisely, it becomes an *Androhung*’ (p. 172). The prodigies of Shakespeare’s storm are not pure, not ‘natural’; they are messages of portent that carry at their origin (who- or whatever it is) a meaning, however obscure, which is addressed, however obscurely, to its recipients. Here is Cicero’s response:

Indeed it is a strange-disposed time.
But men may construe things after their fashion
Clean from the purpose of the things themselves.
Comes Caesar to the Capitol tomorrow?

(I. iii. 33-6)

His claim would be banal were it not so surprising and, ultimately, uneasy with itself. Its banality resides in the fact that Cicero’s initial acknowledgement that the ‘time’ is indeed ‘strange’, is followed by a rationalising dismissal (‘But [...]’) of Caska’s fright. Lines 34-5 are little more than a platitude: interpret the storm how you will, meaning is in the eye of the beholder alone; the ‘things themselves’ only acquire their significance from you. Yet having dismissed the *Androhung* of the storm, why should he immediately ask of Caesar’s movements tomorrow (the Ides of March)? One suspects, at least, that he is not wholly convinced by his own rationalisation. The surprising character of his response—what tells us that it is definitively unsatisfactory—is merely its being Cicero’s. Only a Scene before,

his interlocutor now had been left unable to interpret Cicero's own speech. Caska's narrative had certainly been delivered in his sarcastic and elusive 'fashion', yet he had failed to produce a purely subjective account of the scene in which Cicero had taken such an apparently significant part. What was disclosed/secreted by Caesar's spectacle and by Cicero's Greek did not open a space to be filled by a subjective interpretation clean from their purpose: Caska's (incomplete) interpretation had itself been somehow structured (in its incompleteness) by the messages—spoken and performed—communicated during the scene.

However inadequate it is of itself, Cicero's response to Caska puts us on the track of understanding interpretation in *Julius Caesar*. Although his role in the tragedy is largely Shakespeare's invention, the historical model behind him, and the texts he left behind, were an important focus of Elizabethan schoolboy education, and Shakespeare's use of the term 'construe' certainly provokes associations with lessons in Latin.⁴⁴ In *The Origins of Shakespeare* (1977) Emrys Jones makes the case that *Julius Caesar* owes much to the mode of the Latin syllabus likely to have been taken by its author as a boy. He appeals to a note in a text by the Lutheran educational reformer Melanchthon which proposes that a schoolmaster take an historical question and require from his pupils a Latin response. One such question, Melanchthon suggests, would be whether Brutus was right or wrong in murdering Caesar. 'The reference to Brutus', Jones argues, is interesting,

since it suggests that the subject of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*—the rights and wrongs of the conspiracy and assassination—was used for rhetorical purposes at school. The boys would be trained to find arguments for and against Brutus' act: *there was no question of coming down simple-mindedly on one side.*

(p. 16, emphasis added)

⁴⁴ See David Daniell's editorial note to the Arden edition, I. iii. 34.

The pedagogically instilled demand for adversarial interpretation does not, at least cannot within the drama, amount to a licence to interpret wholly subjectively. When Shakespeare repeats Melanchthon's rhetorical exercise, in English, during the scene of Caesar's funeral it is necessary that for either side to have an effect on the plebs, and that for the whole to have any dramatic effect whatever, neither Brutus' defence nor Antony's condemnation be entirely disqualifiable by the event which they interpret—that the event contain within it the possibility of both its preservation and dereliction as a noble and as an ignoble deed, an act of sacrifice and of butchery. We will consider Shakespeare's procedure in dramatising this for *his* audience further on. For now let us emphasise that the inability to 'come down simple-mindedly on one side' is already internal to what happens onstage, and pertains first of all to those onstage who undertake the task of interpretation. The ultimate issue is not what something means, nor what it can subjectively be made to signify, but rather the originary complexity to which adversarial interpretations of it can only bear witness.

What it signifies remains unknown, but that the storm on 14/15 March 'signifies to' those who suffer its rage is in doubt to no one within the tragedy, even, in spite of himself, to the uneasy Cicero. According to Plutarch the storm produced 'strange and wonderful signs' pointing to the imminent death of Caesar (North's *Caesar* p. 95); but what, regarding that, do they signify exactly? On the morning of the 15th Calphurnia, not known for her superstition (II. ii. 13-4),⁴⁵ fears that the bizarre phenomena of the preceding night are 'things beyond all use', and augur ill for her husband: 'When beggars die there are no comets seen;/The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes' (II. ii. 30-1). But precisely what of the following day's events is being augured? Nothing simple. When, after

⁴⁵ cf. North's *Caesar* p. 97: 'Calphurnia until that time was never given to any fear or superstition'—*desidaimonia* in Plutarch's Greek, *Caesar* LXIII, 7.

Cicero, Cassius confronts Caska in the storm, he tells him that the prodigious phenomena are things

Infused [...] with [...] spirits
To make them instruments of fear and warning
Unto some monstrous state.

(I. iii. 69-71)

Again, something threatens. But Cassius' wording is sufficiently ambiguous as to admit what will be the two contradictory interpretations he gives of the storm. First:

Now could I, Caska, name to thee a man
Most like this dreadful night
That thunders, lightens, opens graves and roars
As doth the lion in the Capitol:
A man no mightier than thyself, or me,
In personal action, yet prodigious grown
And fearful as these strange eruptions are.

(I. iii. 72-8)

Then, a little later:

For now, this fearful night
There is no stir or walking in the streets;
And the complexion of the element
In favour's like the work we have in hand,
Most bloody, fiery, and most terrible.

(I. iii. 126-30)

These are not random, subjective constructions. The storm, and Cassius seems to recognise this, simply is not reducible to a single meaning. Is the 'monstrous state' of which it warns that of Caesar's likely tyranny? Or that of the unnaturalness of the conspiracy in hand against a legitimate statesman? To whom, then, is it a fearful warning, the conspirators or their victim? These questions are not and cannot be satisfactorily answered. The storm is not an unequivocal message; it bears within it, at the time of its occurrence before the event has taken place, both a possible defence and a possible condemnation of the assassination.

So too Calphurnia's prophetic dream of Caesar's statue spouting blood, the Romans bathing in its abject matter (II. ii. 76-81). Decius claims that if it is understood as a cause for fear, the dream is 'all amiss interpreted' (II. ii. 83). Yet Calphurnia's construal is no more or less well grounded than Decius' own (Republican) suggestion of how it 'Signifies that from you [i.e. Caesar] great Rome shall suck/Reviving blood' (II. ii. 86-7). Nothing in the dream permits us only to condone or to condemn the murder. On the contrary, the dream calls forth both interpretative propositions, testaments to the fact that what does happen is in itself not soluble in an either/or fashion.

Caska tells a notable truth when he says of the pseudo-coronation that he can as well be hanged as tell the manner of it. Interpretative decision in *Julius Caesar* is fatal. Caesar does not ignore the signs which augur his death:⁴⁶ he lets one set of interpretations seduce him into a dangerous complacency. Cassius himself will die of a misconstrual, his own percipience, so attuned to the enigmatic *Androhung* of the storm, replaced by the interpretative blindness of Pindarus who sees only defeat on a distant and obscure battlefield (V. iii. 20-47). Indeed the deaths of all the conspirators, figured as revenge for their deed, are arguably the result of their collective attempt wilfully to read Caesar, to 'fashion' him as Brutus says (II. i. 30), as a tyrant; scotomising, sacrificing that complexity of his character which makes the nature of their deed itself (noble? indefensible?) an unresolved and unresolvable question for posterity.

⁴⁶ Indeed, as Cassius says (II. i. 194-6):

he is superstitious grown of late,
Quite from the main opinion he held once
Of fantasy, of dreams, of ceremonies.

Let us, then, move on to an interpretation *of* the play, attempting to hold open its contradictions *as* contradictions, its internal complexity as the playing out of the originary complexity of that which it dramatises.

Eyes of a divided Rome

For Freud the dreamer and interpreter, of course, it is the very ‘ambivalence’ of Brutus towards his victim that makes him such a ready figure for identification. Yet the complexity of Shakespeare’s Brutus is somewhat more profound than Freud consciously acknowledges. In this section, let us return briefly to the seduction scene, where Brutus first appears, and to which can be traced an echo of the other motif of Freud’s dream: namely the fatal power of the paternal look.

Cassius’ ambiguously confessed intention in the scene, articulated the moment Brutus leaves the stage, is to perform on his potential co-conspirator a kind of alchemy. Acknowledging, in a soliloquy riddled with double meaning, that Brutus’ ‘honourable mettle may be wrought/From that it is disposed’ (I. ii. 308-9), he perceives that Brutus is no less susceptible to his own ideological (Republican) position than to sympathy for Caesar. We will return to this extraordinary soliloquy in the next section; let us first consider the seduction to which it directly refers. At the outset of their dialogue, he engages Brutus by an accusation against his friend’s recent coolness. Brutus responds, inaugurating a visual metaphor which will furnish the guiding thread of the seduction by which Cassius hopes to secure his support:

If I have veiled my look,
I turn the trouble of my countenance
Merely upon myself. Vexed I am
Of late with passions of some difference

Conceptions only proper to myself
Which give some soil, perhaps, to my behaviours.
But let not therefore my good friends be grieved
(Among which number, Cassius, you be one)
Nor construe any further my neglect
Than that poor Brutus, with himself at war,
Forgets the shows of love to other men.

(I. ii. 38-47)

The explanation ('soil') of Brutus' apparent neglect concerns problems which are uniquely his own, 'proper' only to him—a conflict without which, one commentator has suggested, he would not be Brutus.⁴⁷ Understated as it is throughout the scene, it remains clear that the 'war' within Brutus concerns his ambivalence (though is not reducible only to it) towards the mounting threat of Caesar's stature following the victory of the latter's military war with Pompey. Overhearing the plebs' off-stage shouts at the pseudo-coronation, Brutus lets slip his 'fear' that the people choose Caesar for their king:

Cassius: Ay, do you fear it?
Then must I think you would not have it so.
Brutus: I would not Cassius, yet I love him well.

(I. ii. 78-82)

The ambivalence with which Freud claims to identify is already present in a manifest form here. But Brutus' earlier words seem to point to a yet more radical and more complex self-alienation which lies behind it as the condition of its possibility. In announcing a certain self-division, an internal alterity with which he is 'at war', Brutus' response to Cassius puts in doubt the very idea of his self-propriety, the very notion of a singular self which can be simply identified, or, as in Freud's case, identified with. The possibility of an internal battle which is 'proper' only to him (private, pertaining to 'himself' alone) presupposes a certain disappropriation of himself from himself, something first of all im-proper, in the conflicted relation with which, precisely, his private discourse is situated. The manifest love-hate

which makes Brutus *Brutus*, which makes him Freud's ('ambivalent') Brutus, is secondary to this prior and more radical impropriety—the precise character of which we will attempt to determine more fully later on.

The function of the 'seduction', from Cassius' perspective, is not to resolve Brutus' manifest ambivalence in favour of pure antagonism towards Caesar. It is, more exactly, to interpellate Brutus in such a way as to simplify this more radical self-alienation, in order to bring into being the great Republican conspirator whose nobility will be affirmed precisely in the ambivalence he bears towards his victim. What Cassius recognises is that in order for Brutus to become Brutus the ambivalent conspirator—to be the murderous Brutus with whom Freud identifies—he must first be made to identify with 'himself'. Thus Cassius pounces on his friend's improper-properness, and relocates the constitutive role of alterity onto a different, *interpersonal* register on which, he claims, Brutus' self can be decisively resolved:

Cassius: Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face?

Brutus: No, Cassius, for the eye sees not itself
But by reflection, by some other thing.

Cassius: 'Tis just,
And it is very much lamented, Brutus,
That you have no such mirrors as will turn
Your hidden worthiness into your eye,
That you might see your shadow: I have heard
Where many of the best respect in Rome
(Except immortal Caesar) speaking of Brutus,
And groaning under this age's yoke,
Have wished that noble Brutus had his eyes.

(I. ii. 51-62)

Invoking a fairly commonplace image, the eye or the I (the self), Brutus punningly concedes, demands for its own definition reflection by something extraneous to it.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Hampton (1990) p. 219.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Troilus and Cressida* III. iii. 90-106.

Cassius' task will thus be to reorient Brutus' gaze from its internal object of alterity to one external. Brutus' gaze must, and he acknowledges the fact, be both active and passive, mediated by passing outside itself: looking at himself reflected in the eye/I of an other, looking at (himself) being looked at. It is within this reciprocity of mutual glances that his internally disunited self will recognise or misrecognise its 'true' self in the supposedly unified form reflected by the other's gaze.⁴⁹ Brutus' internal war will continue as a war at least until the small hours of the day of the assassination, when he receives letters forged by Cassius exhorting him to 'awake and see thyself' (II. i. 46). Cassius is his 'glass' (I. ii. 68)—the mirror which claims at least to proffer to him a unified, identifiable self, which would conscript him into the Republican cause by labouring to smooth over the complexity which characterises his (im)proper self at the outset. The paradoxes of this procedure will be demonstrated later on.

The mutuality and reciprocity of gazes in which the (Republican) Brutus is supposedly to be (mis)recognised and made 'proper' forms a visual trope of dependence on alterity by which the tyrannical threat represented by Caesar's nascent ascendancy is metaphorically defined. Soliloquising in his garden, moments before the arrival of Cassius' letters, Brutus figures the tyrant that Caesar might become in terms exactly contrary to those invoked by Cassius towards Brutus himself:

But 'tis a common proof
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder
Whereto the climber upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmost round
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend.

(II. i. 21-27)

⁴⁹ On the reflective and asymptotic misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) of itself as unified by the disunited pre-subject, see Lacan (1949).

The tyrant (crucially, not the tyrant Caesar *is*, but that he might become) repudiates dependency; only his back parts, and specifically not his face, can be seen. His eyes look, and are not to be looked at. Hoping to banish Calphurnia's fears of what the day will bring, just hours later Caesar will himself repeat the image in a passage which we will not say is the literary origin of the motif of the fatal look in Freud's dream, but which perhaps shares a textual origin with it:

The things that threatened me
Ne'er looked but on my back: when they shall see
The face of Caesar, they are vanished.
(II. ii. 10-12)⁵⁰

As Brücke in Freud's dream, Caesar's eyes are everything like the sun, or so he threatens. His words are an explicit paraphrase of God's to Moses having commanded the Law on Mount Sinai: 'And he said, Thou canst not see my face : for there shall no man see me and live [...] thou shalt see my back parts : but my face shall not be seen' (Exodus 33: 20-3). Conceiving himself, literally as the sovereign I AM, Caesar as 'Caesar', at this moment, claims to be positioned outside the economy of the mutual gaze, an autotelic (Oedipean) giant.⁵¹ And this notion of his peerless exteriority brings us to the question of fratricide.

At the opening of the play Rome has been, like Brutus, 'at war'—a civil war, in fact, and thus, like Brutus, 'with itself at war'. The first scene presents the plebs crowding the streets to welcome home Caesar as the victor over Pompey. The latter had actually been defeated at Pharsalia in 48; his sons had been defeated at Spain in 45, and the year of Caesar's assassination (in which the play is set) was 44. Shakespeare takes a certain liberty

⁵⁰ Note that as Cassius tries to impress upon Brutus the mortal frailty of this alleged 'god', invoking Caesar's sickness during the campaign in Spain, he describes how 'that same eye, whose bend doth awe the world,/Did lose his lustre' (I. ii. 123-4).

as regards the true historical chronology of events. Not only is Caesar's return to Rome after the war relocated and set in the year of his death; the victories at Pharsalia and Spain appear ambiguously telescoped into a single triumph.⁵² For Plutarch, the war had been something of an inevitability:

For Crassus being killed among the Parthians [...] nothing kept Caesar from being the greatest person, but because he destroyed not Pompey that was the greater: neither did anything let Pompey to withstand that it should not come to pass, but because he did not first overcome Caesar, whom only he feared.

(North's *Caesar* pp. 43-4)

In Shakespeare's source, at least, the civil war staged a battle between Rome's two greatest equals, after the power sharing arrangement of the first triumvirate had been destabilised by the loss of Crassus. Without the apparatus of the triumvirate, Plutarch suggests, the mutual dependence which it had exerted on its principal protagonists became little more than an enforced restraint on personal ambition.

While there is no explicit attempt in Plutarch to frame the rivalry between these two ambitious equals as 'fraternal', for Shakespeare it is difficult to resist. He chooses, in a further historical elision, to set Caesar's triumphant return (and pseudo-coronation) during the celebrations of the Lupercal (I. i. 68). As Plutarch states in the first book of the *Lives*, 'the name of the festival has the meaning of the Greek "Lycaea" or *feast of wolves*', and is thus connected with the extraordinary suckling of Romulus and Remus, at the place of which the course run by the Luperci traditionally began (*Romulus* XXI 3-4). A commemoration of the mythical foundation of Rome, and, by extension, its unification

⁵¹ It should be added that the historical Caesar was made perpetual Dictator, which is to say: the one who speaks the law—a fact which Plutarch calls 'plain tyranny' (North's *Caesar* p. 85), but which Shakespeare chooses never explicitly to mention.

⁵² The Arden editor points out that the tribune Murellus' angry rebuke to the plebs that Caesar 'comes in triumph over *Pompey's blood*' (my italics) implies both the literal blood of Pompey and the triumph over Pompey's kin (I. i. 52 and n.).

under the Romulean monarchy,⁵³ the Lupercal contains within it a certain ‘forgetting’ of the fratricidal cost of the establishment of the very community by and for whom it is celebrated.⁵⁴ Conflating the Lupercal with the return of Caesar, Shakespeare at once lifts that forgetting and invests the Caesarean triumph with its significance.

If we say that Shakespeare lifts the amnesia internal to the festivities of the Lupercal it is because, however decisive has been Pompey’s defeat, the civil war is far from being over at the beginning of the play. The voice of the dead brother is still strongly audible in its opposition to the victor. Against the carnival spirit of the plebs who come to welcome Caesar, the tribunes Flavius and Murellus try to render explicit the internecine destruction at the heart of what they celebrate:

Murellus: Wherefore rejoice? What conquest brings he home?
 What tributaries follow him to Rome
 To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels?
(I. i. 33-5)

Those who have suffered for the unified establishment of ‘Caesar’s’ Rome belong to Rome itself; and to that extent his victory recalls as much the violence forgotten in the Romulean commemoration of the Lupercal as its explicit content confers the glory of antique precedent upon him:

[...] O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,
 Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
 Have you climbed up to walls and battlements
 To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
 Your infants in your arms and there have sat
 The livelong day, with patient expectation,
 To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome [...]
 And do you now strew flowers in his way,
 That comes in triumph over Pompey’s blood?
 Be gone!

⁵³ See Miola (1983) p. 80.

⁵⁴ On the necessary ‘forgetting of that which may question the community and its legitimacy’ as structural to commemorative practice in general see Lyotard (1988) pp. 7 ff.

Run to your houses, fall upon your knees,
 Pray to the gods to intermit the plague
 That needs must light on this ingratitude.

(I. i. 37-56)

Thus in spite of the festivities, Flavius insists that the statues of Caesar hung with trophies of victory be stripped, because

These growing feathers, plucked from Caesar's wing
 Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,
 Who else would *soar above the view of men*.

(I. i. 73-5 my italics)

The metaphor of sight anticipates its own elaboration in the next scenes, of course. Caesar has vanquished his only equal in order no longer to be 'looked at'. There will, they fear, be no mutual gaze remaining to reciprocate great Caesar's. He has, from the Republican perspective at least, eliminated his (br)other.⁵⁵

Child of...an enigma: Brutus' double coinage

In spite of the apparent specular differentiation that is invoked to mark the opposition between Caesar and Brutus, it is on what equally and at the same time binds the two that Brutus' more radical self-alienation is founded. Here is the first part of Cassius' soliloquy at the close of the seduction scene:

Well, Brutus, thou art noble; yet I see
 Thy honourable mettle may be wrought
 From that it is disposed. Therefore it is meet
 That noble minds keep ever with their likes;
 For who so firm that cannot be seduced?
 Caesar doth bear me hard, but he loves Brutus.
 If I were Brutus now, and he were Cassius,
 He should not humour me.

(I. ii. 306-15)

⁵⁵ Other parallels between Romulus and Caesar are noted by Miola (1983) p. 80; and cf. Conn Liebler (1995) pp. 88 ff.

Precisely what is the ‘nobility’, the ‘honourableness’ to which Cassius initially refers? Nothing in what follows allows us to decide finally whether they pertain to Cassius’ admiration for Brutus’ Republicanism, or for his so far loving endurance, in spite of that, of Caesar’s ongoing ascent. The complexity of the passage rests on the pronoun of 306: ‘If I were Brutus now, and he were Cassius/*He* should not humour me’. The ambiguity of its referent, following on from the observation that Caesar holds Cassius in disfavour but loves Brutus, makes Cassius’ claim understandable in two wholly opposed ways: ‘If I (Cassius) were Brutus (and thus if Caesar loved me), and Brutus were Cassius (and was thus disfavoured by Caesar), *he* (Brutus, in the position of Republican seducer) could not wrench me from the love of Caesar’. Equally: ‘If I (Cassius) were Brutus (and thus even if Caesar loved me), and Brutus were Cassius (and was thus disfavoured by Caesar), he (Caesar, despite the love he bears me) could not wrench me from my duty as a Republican’. Everything turns on this difficulty. Is Brutus seducible from the mettle of his natural Republicanism by the adoring Caesar, or from his natural affection for Caesar by the machinations of Cassius? To whom, originally, is he more naturally ‘like’ in mind? Is not the honourable mettle of the noble Brutus undecidably that of his innate Republicanism *and* his love for the man who allegedly threatens it?

We can begin to grasp the full complexity of what it is to which Brutus is-and-is-not ‘disposed’ by referring to a single significant device of Cassius’ seduction procedure. Towards the end of the soliloquy, he announces his intention to send the forged letters to Brutus,

As if they came from several citizens,
 Writings all tending to the great opinion
 That Rome holds of his name [...]

(I. ii. 316-8)

His name bears an illustrious history. The Brutus of 44BC was alleged to be the descendent of Lucius Junius Brutus, the expeller of the Tarquins and by tradition the founder of the Republic.⁵⁶ Earlier, in the midst of his censure of Caesar's 'colossal' stature, Cassius had reminded his friend of the fact:

O, you and I have heard our fathers say
There was a Brutus once who would have brooked
Th' eternal devil to keep his state in Rome
As easily as a king.

(I. ii. 157-60)

This is the model with which Brutus must identify, before he can become the ambivalent, murderous 'model' with whom Freud identifies in his dream. Brutus' ancient heritage is the first point touched on in Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*; and Cassius' efforts in appealing to it clearly help propel the trope of reflection and recognition in Shakespeare's seduction scene: *Ara agnoeis, ô Brute, seauton?* Cassius asks (*Brutus* X 3). It is rendered by North, 'What, knowest thou not that thou art Brutus' (p. 122). The paradox opened up here is familiar. In Plutarch's Greek we hear again the Delphic imperative discussed in the previous chapter: *gnothi seaton* (Know Thyself).⁵⁷ Do you not know yourself (to be) Brutus? To know himself as Brutus, he must recognise himself as *a* Brutus. To know and be himself he must acknowledge what is it in him that is not (simply) his own self; and, chiasmatically, it is in that acknowledgement of the not-me that his supposedly true self is to be accomplished. The double-bind makes its way into Shakespeare's seduction scene without being resolved:

Brutus: Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,
That you would have me seek into myself

⁵⁶ Shakespeare had already treated this legend in *The Rape of Lucrece*. For Lucius Junius Brutus see esp. the 'Argument' to the poem, and lines 1807-55.

⁵⁷ Note that a likely Renaissance source for Shakespeare's eye/I motif is Sir John Davies' poem *Nosce Teipsum* (i.e. Know Thyself) lines 105-8. The play's relation to that section of Davies' poem is given detailed treatment in Simmons (1973) pp. 95ff.

For that which is not in me?
Cassius: Therefore, good Brutus, be prepared to hear.
 And since you know you cannot see yourself
 So well as by reflection, I your glass
 Will modestly discover to yourself
 That of yourself which yet you know not of.
 (I. ii. 63-70)

The image of himself in which his supposedly true and unified self is to be recognised is both not (in) him (65), and more profoundly in himself, 'of' himself (70) than he yet knows. The moment in the small hours of the Ides of March at which his resolution becomes firm having read the forgeries, is the accomplishment of this paradox *as* paradox:

'Brutus, thou sleep'st; awake and see thyself.
 Shall Rome, et cetera. Speak, strike redress' [...]
 My ancestors did from the streets of Rome
 The Tarquin drive, when he was called a king.
 'Speak, strike, redress'. Am I entreated
 To speak and strike? O Rome, I make thee promise,
 If the redress will follow, thou receivest
 Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus.
 (II. i. 46-58)

Am *I* entreated? Again there can be no resolute answer. He makes his promise to Rome using the first person pronoun (56), only to relinquish it with the illeistic, third person invocation of the name he has inherited (58). Both inside and outside himself, *I* (Brutus) promise, he says, that the hand of *Brutus* (the descendant) will redress... The moment of centring, the accomplishment of selfhood, is equally and necessarily one of decentring.

Brutus' seduction by Cassius is something more than an elaborate and manipulative trick of mirrors. At work within the commonplace trope of mutual reflection which defines Cassius' strategy, indeed what that seductive strategy aims to render explicit and effective, is a prior seduction in the more radical sense of a paternal or ancestral imprint. The word 'noble', after all, used in Cassius' soliloquy and so often elsewhere as an adjective for

Brutus and his allegiance to Rome,⁵⁸ also names a coin, stamped in advance with its particular denominative insignia, and thus a ready metaphor in the Shakespearean corpus for the stamp of reproductive agency.⁵⁹ The model of autonomous selfhood which steps forth out of the cutting off of the *pater patriae* will always in *Julius Caesar* be compromised by this fact that for Brutus to become Brutus the great ‘tyrannicide’ he must in the first place have been made to acknowledge to be lodged within him the presence of a self which is not wholly his ‘own’.

Yet we must go further. For the elder Brutus is only half the story of this coinage, and only half the story of what it is in/of Brutus which Cassius’ seduction brings about. During his funeral oration for Caesar, Antony reconstructs for his audience the violence of Caesar’s death, exposing to the plebs the torn and bloodstained mantle that the conspirators’ victim had worn:

Through this [tear], the well-beloved Brutus stabbed,
And as he plucked his cursed steel away,
Mark how the blood of Caesar followed it,
As rushing out of doors to be resolved
If Brutus so unkindly knocked or no;
For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar’s angel.
Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him.
This was the most unkindest cut of all [...]
(III. ii. 174-81)

An angel, like a noble, is a stamped coin.⁶⁰ The twice iterated ‘unkindness’ to which the wound is required to bear testimony connotes not just cruelty but the breaching of a natural filial bond. The suggestion of Brutus’ alternative coinage is not Shakespeare’s invention; Plutarch makes reference to the tradition of his illegitimate paternity, then abandons the

⁵⁸ Cf. I. ii. 62; I. iii. 141; III. i. 135; III. ii. 11; IV. iii. 158-160; V. iii. 74; V. iv. 15; V. iv. 22; V. v. 69.

⁵⁹ On the erotic significance of coinage cf. esp. *Measure for Measure* II. iv. 45-49, where ‘mettle’ is also invoked as a metaphor for semen; *Cymbeline* II. v. 5.

matter, never seriously allowing it to challenge the belief that Brutus was the true descendant of his heroic namesake.⁶¹ The two heritages are mutually exclusive; and certainly the emphasis in Shakespeare is in favour of that stemming from Lucius Junius. But there is no decision made, finally, between them. The genealogy insisted on by Cassius and that codedly affirmed by Antony are licensed to coexist, both exerting an influence on Cassius' extraordinary soliloquy.⁶²

Beyond the contradictory impulses of Brutus the Republican *character*, with whom Freud identifies in his dream, lies the fact that as a *text* the tragedy is unwilling to simplify ambivalence, complexity, contradiction as such, and rather allows itself to be shaped by them. Plutarch is not a resource from which Shakespeare merely pulls this or that fact which facilitates the clear and linear progress of his drama. The contradictory genealogies of Brutus which are expressed and judged there, are transposed into the tragedy without the censorship of straightforward logic. Neither is ruled out by the Olympian purview of retrospect or by pragmatic decision. Both are put into play in the drama/dramatisation of the lived moments of Brutus' life itself. The reality, so to speak, of Shakespeare's text is definitively not historical, if we understand by that term the effort to recover what 'actually

⁶⁰ For the paternal imprint on the angel cf. *Merchant of Venice* II. vii. 55-9. On the metaphorical significance of nobles and angels more generally see the relevant passages in Webb (1989).

⁶¹ 'Some say that [Caesar protected Brutus at Pharsalia] for Servilla's sake, Brutus' mother. For when he was a young man, he had been acquainted with Servilla, who was extremely in love with him. And because Brutus was born in that time when their love was hottest, he persuaded himself that he begat him' (North's Brutus, p. 114). Suetonius (1957) is somewhat more indirect: see his *Caesar* 50, and 82 where instead of the famous '*Et tu, Brute?*' he reports Caesar's final cry as, 'You too, my child?'

⁶² While it is not unusual for Shakespearean commentators to invoke the tradition of Caesar's paternity of Brutus in connection with Plutarch's texts, Toubiana's account (1988) is, so far as I am aware, the only one which directly addresses its impact on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and its significance for our understanding of the tragedy. I cannot, however, agree with his attempt merely to fit Shakespeare to the source texts. He appears to perceive no contradiction between the two possible lineages suggested both in Suetonius and Plutarch (Toubiana pp. 39-40); and his citation of Suetonius' 'You too, my child? [*kai su, teknon?*]' (p. 39) in connection with Shakespeare's text is something of an over-interpretation of the 'real' parricidal content of (Shakespeare's) Brutus' deed, and thus an eclipsing of the singularity of Shakespeare's play. The more neutral '*Et tu, Brute?*' which Shakespeare chooses (and which is not attributable to any classical source) holds the

happened'. Nor, equally obviously, is it a wholly fantastic reworking of an historical moment. Brutus' double coinage points rather to a third possibility: a *dramatic reality* so to speak which, like Caska's earlier narrative, indicates and, in this case, plays out something unclear, unresolved at the moment of its occurrence. In the previous Chapter we witnessed how the beating fantasies collected by Freud from his patients were irreducible to the material actions in which they consisted, bearing within them, as they did, the enigmatic desire of the beating father. We also saw, how the ontogeny of Oedipus was repeated in the dramaturgy of his tragedy, such that the recovered scene(s) of binding/murder/incest emerged as originarily palimpsestic. So too, with regard to Brutus, *Julius Caesar* seeks not to represent the factual, material actions of what occurred so much as what of it is already enigmatic and prohibits the assumption that what 'actually happened' is finally reducible to a bedrock of material facts. Certainly the audience, like the plebs before Caesar, cannot ultimately decide. But what is more, within the play, the decision is impossible for a Brutus who is consequently at war with himself. He is not in any straightforward way just a subject interpellated by 'the' paternal other. Exactly who that other is, the paternal place itself, is the enigma—the gap which by its enigmatic nature issues contradictory demands: to whom—Caesar or the elder Brutus—*should* Marcus Brutus be more like in mind? What is it that ancestry desires of him? If these contradictory genealogies overdetermine Brutus' ambivalence—an ambivalence in which Freud recognises the truth of his unconscious desire—then we might, by extension, say that in the relationship between *Julius Caesar* and its principal source-text, the former shows itself as unwilling to resolve complexity and contradiction as Freud argues is the unconscious itself.

contradiction open, as a contradiction, precisely by refusing to allow the alleged father decisively to claim Brutus as his son.

Let us move on to witness the effects of Brutus' double self-alienation and the essential function it is assigned in his full determination as 'Brutus'.

The Ides of March are come: interpretation and identification

Cassius is not naïve. To the extent that he is enabled by Shakespeare to sustain two opposed interpretations of the storm, and to the extent that his seduction soliloquy allows the contradictory paternities of Brutus to remain in play, he is the originator of some of the most perspicacious insights in the tragedy. The enigma of what is demanded of Brutus by his double ancestry is not mobilised in the text as an obstruction to Cassius' designs, it is, as will be seen, the *positive condition* of Brutus' becoming the chief conspirator against Caesar. It is this doubleness, complexity as such, to which Cassius' discourse is so sensitive, that makes Brutus' becoming-Brutus possible.

Before attempting to detail why, let us first try to comprehend the complexity of Caesar's alleged tyranny. As with the question of his illegitimate paternity of Brutus, the political tyranny with which he is charged—that is, his illegitimate paternity over Rome and the egocentrism of his rule—remains as decisively unclear to Shakespeare's audience as the question of what Caesar *wants* remains to the plebs in the forum.

Where is there evidence of Caesar's tyranny or tyrannical desires? Everywhere and nowhere. The longest and most sustained allegations come from Cassius to Brutus in I. i., decrying the god-like status of one who is in reality no more than an ordinary mortal. Yet we know Cassius has his own agenda to make Brutus' resolution firm; and, what is more, we know that his interpretations of the storm leave undecided whether the 'monstrous state' which they augur pertains to the unnaturalness of Caesar's rule or of the deed in hand. With

regard to Caesar's own political gestures, witnessed by the audience and unmediated by the prejudicial representations of the Republicans, the text labours not to come down simply-mindedly either on their side or that of their victim. There is no moment in the drama equivalent to the narrative judgement of Plutarch's on Caesar's being made perpetual Dictator, 'This was plain tyranny' (North's *Caesar* p. 85). The issue has been addressed in detail by Miola (1985) who has identified moments in the plot at which Caesar fulfils the criteria of the tyrant as they are described in various political treatises, and others at which he resolutely does not.⁶³ On the one hand Caesar's rise has evidently been at the cost of his own countrymen, and, specifically, as we know, of 'Pompey's blood'. To that extent it marks a violent usurpation, the progress towards an individual, rather than a shared rule, which was forbidden by the constitutional and legal traditions of the Republic. Like Plato's tyrant, Caesar expresses his fear of plots and conspiracies;⁶⁴ and like Plato's tyrant he elicits comparison with a wolf (I. iii. 104).⁶⁵ While in Plutarch Flavius and Murellus are stripped of their tribuneships for having removed the trophies from Caesar's statues (North's *Caesar* p. 93), in Shakespeare we hear only the more sinisterly ambiguous news that the pair have been 'put to silence' (I. ii. 285-6). On the Ides of March Caesar demonstrates the classic *superbia* of the tyrant, declining to come to the Senate and offering no other explanation than that 'The cause is in my will' (II. ii. 71). Equally, once coaxed there with the promise of the crown he refuses the petition for the return of Cimber's brother not on the basis of discussion but merely by referring to the unshakeable and

⁶³ Miola's sources for definitions of the tyrant which Shakespeare's text invokes, denies, or to which it corresponds, include: Aquinas, Aristotle, Bartolus, Buchanan, 'Junius Brutus' (the pseudonymous author of *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannus*), Erasmus, La Primaudaye, Plato, Plutarch and Salutati. In what follows I will mention only Miola's most salient points: with the exception of Plato and Plutarch, to whose writings we have already made reference, specific correspondences with and discrepancies from the works of these authors, and the precise refinements of their definitions, should be verified by referring to Miola's essay directly.

⁶⁴ See Plato (1955) 575d-576a; 578b-579c.

permanent authority of his past decision: his word is law. Indeed Caesar's final speech in the play, entirely Shakespeare's invention, reeks of the colossal arrogance and quasi-deific monomania of which Cassius originally had spoken to Brutus:

I could be well moved if I were you:
 If I could pray to move, prayers would move me.
 But I am constant as the northern star,
 Of whose true-fixed and resting quality
 There is no fellow in the firmament.
 The skies are painted with unnumbered sparks;
 They are all fire, and every one doth shine;
 But there's but one in all doth hold his place.
 So in the world, 'tis furnished well with men,
 And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive.
 Yet in the number I do know but one
 That unassailable holds on his rank
 Unshaked of motion. And that I am he
 Let me a little show even in this,
 That I was constant Cimber should be banished
 And constant do remain to keep him so.

(III. i. 58-73)

But if Shakespeare's text works hard to give some credence to Cassius' claims, it labours equally to cast doubt on them. The missives to Brutus in Plutarch are genuine; in having Cassius forge the letters to Brutus, Shakespeare strays significantly from his source, making Cassius' motivations and judgement somewhat suspicious.⁶⁵ Equally, for Plutarch what made Caesar 'mortally hated' was his 'covetous desire [...] to be called king' (North's *Caesar* p. 90). Yet Shakespeare chooses not to depict the well-known historical conflict between Caesar and the Senate, 'strong evidence [in the historical texts]', Miola says, 'of a tyrant in entrance, of one who arrogates to himself unlawful prerogatives and powers' (1985 p. 278). Instead the Senate *offer* him the crown (II. ii. 92-104). If he does harbour the technically unconstitutional 'desire' of attaining the crown (and nothing during the pseudo-

⁶⁵ See Plato (1955) 566a.

⁶⁶ See North's *Caesar* p. 94-5 and North's *Brutus* p. 120-1.

coronation invites us only to believe or disbelieve this), it is an ambition shared and legitimated by the Roman government. Coaxed to the Capitol on the basis of this offer and Decius' favourable interpretation of Calphurnia's dream (II. ii. 83-107), Caesar is accosted by Artemidorus who implores him to read a letter in which is contained a warning of his imminent death. Plutarch has Caesar accept the letter, yet says Caesar was unable to read it in the press of the crowd (North's *Caesar* p. 99). In Shakespeare, Caesar refuses to accept it, dismissing Artemidorus' claim that it 'touches Caesar' with the ostensibly modest assertion that 'What touches ourself shall be last served' (III. i. 7 and 8). Finally, this capacity for self-sacrifice and concern for public welfare emerges most forcefully after Caesar's death. If, on the morning of the 15th his 'will' alone dictates that he remain at home, later that day Antony's reading of his last will and testament reveals a remarkable magnanimity and generosity towards the very citizens in whose name his assassination is supposedly undertaken (III. ii. 232-243).

Later on I will return to the question of the will in order to suggest that what it contains and what its effects amount to an irreducible paradox which ultimately emblematises, and refuses to disclose any final truth regarding Caesar's ambition which is so ambiguously articulated within, these discrete moments of pragmatic and contradictory characterisation (now tyrannical, now non-tyrannical). It is a paradox which will haunt both the conspirators and the pro-Caesarean faction during and after the 15th. For now, let return to an introspective Brutus on the morning of the murder, and attempt to understand the process by which he seeks to organise and justify the assassination.

It should be noted straightway that Shakespeare takes pains to draw parallels between Brutus and his victim-to-be. II. i. and II. ii. present Brutus and Caesar respectively

in their domestic environments. Each is shown in dialogue with his wife; each is entertaining at least the possibility of Caesar's death; each, in turn greets the band of conspirators; and each, as he does so, is in the process of interpreting signs: Caesar and Calphurnia attempt to interpret the latter's dream and the evening's unnatural storm, and Brutus reads Cassius' forged letters, illuminated by the whizzing exhalations of the disturbed heavens. Like (illegitimate) father, like son? Not quite. What is really at stake is an implicit structural parallel between 'tyrannicide' and 'tyranny' on which the implicit filial connection has a bearing.

Once Brutus has determined to undertake the deed in hand (and we will return to the manner of his decision presently), and the rest of the conspirators arrive to speak with him, we begin to witness a striking resemblance emerge between the form of leadership for whose abolition Brutus is prepared to kill, and his organisation of the band who take it upon themselves to do the killing. There is an obscure moment when Brutus and Cassius move aside to talk in private, and the rest discuss the dawning day. Caska insists to Decius and Cinna that the sun does not rise in the east. Shifting southwards, 'here', he says, 'as I point my sword, the sun arises' (II. i. 105). The Arden editor points out in his note to the line the attractiveness of having Caska direct his sword at Brutus, perhaps as the revolutionary harbinger of a new Republican dawn. But, if we hear in Caska's words a reference to the rebellious 'son', do we not also hear a sense of the threatening, paternal ascendance of a Caesar whose blazing face cannot be looked at—an identification perhaps between the tyrant and his slayer embedded in the play of sun/son? There is no stage direction to support and confirm the suggestion; but within seconds Brutus begins to behave in a

manner allegedly akin to his nemesis. '[L]et us swear our resolution', Cassius proposes, as he and Brutus turn back to the others. 'No', Brutus interjects, 'not an oath':

If not the face of men,
The sufferance of our souls, the time's abuse;
If these be motives weak, break off betimes,
And every man hence to his idle bed [...]
But if these
As I am sure they do, bear fire enough
To kindle cowards and to steel with valour
The melting spirits of women: then, countrymen,
What need we any spur but our own cause
To prick us to redress? What other bond
Than secret Romans that have spake the word
And will not palter? And with what other oath,
Than honesty to honesty engaged,
That this shall be, or we will fall for it?

(II. i. 113-27)

No oath, no promise. Cassius is thoroughly overridden (he does not even respond) by Brutus' insistence that their deed is not simply imperative to undertake but as it were *impossible* not to accomplish. Their souls' sufferance, the abuse of the time: to swear an oath to end these things would be to suppose that these things only make the murder a necessary *undertaking* (something is rotten in the state of Rome: let us therefore promise to redress it). Refusing to swear an oath removes the deed from the realm of contingency and forces it into that of inevitability or law (insofar as something is rotten in the state of Rome it cannot *not* be redressed). Such is the logic of the promise: to be a promise it must by definition contain that threat that it always might not be fulfilled.⁶⁷ Brutus has evidently forgotten, or does not care to remember, that the last time he had spoken of 'redress', just fifty or so lines earlier, it was in the context of his own promise, as 'Brutus', to Rome. Yet, his private, Republican oath sealed, his own decision made, the deed in hand ceases to be a

⁶⁷ Cf. Bennington (2000b) pp. 42 and 206 n. 22.

question of decision or promise at all. Not unlike the deific Caesar, Brutus now speaks as if his word has become law.

He will persist in this manner throughout his dealings with the co-conspirators.

Cassius' next suggestion is that Cicero be included in their number. 'Let us not leave him out', Caska implores; 'No, by no means' adds Cinna; 'O let us have him [...]' Metellus echoes. Then Brutus:

O name him not. Let us not break with him,
For he will never follow anything
That other men begin
Cassius: Then leave him out
Caska: Indeed he is not fit.

(II. i. 142-152)

Brutus' position is not unlike that which will fall to Caesar in the final seconds of his life, surrounded by the conspirators, imploring his acquiescence on behalf of a friend. Brutus, unlike Caesar, at least gives a good reason for his refusal; but the reason is his concern that Cicero is not one to 'follow' others. No sooner has he given it than the rest, precisely, follow. The fraternal bond of these 'brothers', supposedly united against the notion of ultimate authority's being invested in 'but only one man' as Cassius puts it (I. ii. 156), is entirely disrupted by the singular authority which accrues to Brutus and only Brutus: his role in the conspiracy looks dangerously similar to the form of power against which they all conspire.

Cassius' final proposal, that Antony be assassinated too, is just as avidly disqualified:

Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,
To cut the head off and then hack the limbs—
Like wrath in death and envy afterwards—
For Antony is but a limb of Caesar.
Let's be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius [...]

Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds [...]
 This shall make
Our purpose necessary and not envious,
Which so appearing to the common eyes,
We shall be called purgers, not murderers.

(II. i. 161-179)

Again overriding Cassius (and in this case fatally) Brutus words' belie his intentions.

Caesar's death is (to be construed as) an unavoidable sacrifice to Rome. At once he thus acknowledges and utterly disavows the contingency of the deed. If the assassination is to be a sacrifice in the name of the Republic, it must not elicit or admit an alternative construal. Let us be sacrificers: if it were true, *unconditionally* true, that they are, then there could be no question of their being thought butchers. Attempting, needing to control in advance the general interpretation, the reception by posterity, of the event to come, Brutus' words concede, albeit implicitly, that the deed might always admit of alternative readings. The 'common eyes' must, then, not be enabled to be active, but must be directed unilaterally, manipulated in their perception in order, paradoxically, for this Republican sacrifice to succeed. For it to be a sacrifice to Rome, it must, says Brutus, sacrifice the freedom of Rome to understand it in any other way.

There are two inseparable points to clarify here. Firstly, and to repeat, as Brutus becomes 'Brutus' the Republican, his consequent leadership of the conspiracy begins to resemble the tyranny against which it establishes itself. The more resolutely Republican he is, the more tyrannical he appears to be, as if the one alleged paternity paradoxically confirms the other. Brutus materialises as 'Brutus' not in the inevitably self-displaced (allocentric) relation to a single ancestor, but in relation to the very enigma that his ancestry is. Whether he knows it or not, he becomes 'himself' in the process of dispersing his

selfhood in the fulfilment of contradictory ancestral demands. Secondly, the Republican deed of which he takes charge follows exactly the same paradoxical path. It must, in the very name of freedom, exert a constraint on freedom. To be a Republican gesture *and nothing but*, it must *also* be everything but itself, it must exert a kind of hermeneutic tyranny over the eyes of its witnesses and of posterity.⁶⁸

Freud's *Non-vixit* dream—what remains implicit within it and 'missed' from its interpretations—is wholly saturated by the same paradoxes. In becoming 'Brutus', Shakespeare's character explicitly identifies with an earlier model of the great Republican Brutus, while his pursuit of the Republican cause reveals itself to have a model in the tyranny (supposedly embodied in Caesar) against which he rebels. So too Freud, who explicitly claims to identify with (Shakespeare's) rebellious son Brutus, yet who precisely in order to repeat the murder committed by Brutus (killing P.) must first have appropriated to himself the defining characteristic of his own paternal 'tyrant' Brücke: namely the Biblical/Caesarean trope of the killing look.

Returning to the text, the charge that Brutus identifies with Caesar must, however, be made with caution. Insofar as Brutus becomes a tyrant himself he can be said not to identify with Caesar as such but with that portion of Caesar which he must keep alive provisionally in order to be able to kill him altogether. We have already mentioned the soliloquy in which Brutus calls forth Lucius Junius Brutus as an ancestral model, but let us turn to the lines immediately preceding it (an earlier portion of the soliloquy, interrupted by his servant) where Brutus determines that Caesar must go. Unlike Cassius whose first speeches present a univocal construal of Caesar as colossal tyrant, and who then

⁶⁸ Note the call of the Roman people when Brutus initially manages to convince them of the justice of the deed: 'Let him be Caesar' (III. ii. 51); 'Caesar's better parts/Shall be crowned in Brutus' (III. ii. 51-2).

acknowledges a more ambivalent possibility in his interpretations of the storm, Brutus first equivocates, and only afterwards makes his resolution firm by settling for a single interpretation of Caesar:

It must be by his death: and for my part
 I know no personal cause to spurn at him
 But for the general. He would be crowned:
 How that might change his nature, there's the question.
 It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
 And that craves wary walking. Crown him that,
 And then I grant we put a sting in him
 That at his will he may do danger with.
 Th'abuse of greatness is when it disjoins
 Remorse from power; and to speak the truth of Caesar
 I have not known when his affections swayed
 More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof
 That lowliness is young ambition's ladder
 Whereto the climber upward turns his face;
 But when he once attains the utmost round
 He then unto the ladder turns his back,
 Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
 By which he did ascend. So Caesar may.
 Then, lest he may, prevent. And since the quarrel
 Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
 Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
 Would run to these and these extremities.
 And therefore think him as a serpent's egg
 Which hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous,
 And kill him in the shell.

(II. i. 10-34)

Caesar *is* not a tyrant. The problem is that, in his embryonic form, he shows signs that he may, and only may, *become* one, were he given the sting. He may materialise as the blazing-faced God in terms of which we know he already speaks of himself. But if Caesar is assassinated now, in advance of that materialisation, it would not, in the strict sense, constitute a tyrannicide. To rationalise and to justify the deed Brutus must forcibly construe Caesar in a particular way ('Fashion it thus [...]'). Again this is no random construction, but a legitimate interpretation of the signs displayed by Caesar-in-chrysalis. But it is one

which, as we have seen, Shakespeare works hard to show does not delegitimise the contrary reading.⁶⁹ *It is what Caesar always-might-, and also always-might-not-, become that need be prevented. His murder will always have been a premature event.* Brutus must interpret what Caesar is in relation to what he will have become, so as to resolve himself to become 'Brutus'. In order for the murder to be possible and necessary (for it is only as a necessity to Republican Rome that Brutus can countenance the possibility of the murder of his beloved Caesar), the necessary possibility that the deed might be (perceived as) illegitimate must first have been forcibly expunged. To be 'Brutus' who will lead the conspirators in the purge of Caesar for the 'general cause', he must already have purged interpretatively everything of Caesar *as he is* which would militate against the requirement of his murder. To be fully and properly sacrificed at all, Caesar must in advance have been sacrificed a little. Caesar, in all his complexity, must, to Brutus, already be dead: *Non-vixit* before *Non-vivit*.

But not yet gone: translation and the event of 'tyrannicide'

In presenting and attempting to forge or fashion the deed as no more than an inevitability whose meaning would be indisputable, Brutus might be said to be trying to confer proleptically upon the deed the transparent simplicity, the simple factuality, which Freud attributes retrospectively to the murder of the primal tyrant in *Totem and Taboo*. In both cases thought will have passed (or will ideally have been perceived to pass) directly

⁶⁹ Cf. the symptomatic tension in Brutus' earliest promising response to Cassius' seduction (I. ii. 171-5):
 Brutus had rather be a villager
 Than to repute himself a son of Rome
 Under *these* hard conditions *as this time*
Is like to lay upon us.

The awkward temporal syntax of the lines suggest that Brutus must force the threat of hard conditions (which are yet only 'like' to come) into the present ('these', not 'those').

into action, without the mediation of fantasy, without the contingency to which an oath could not but testify: the deed simply happens.

After the murder of the primal father, Freud says that the sons began to feel guilty for their action, and that the joint systems of exogamy and totemism arose as a result. The first amounted to a renunciation of the fruits of the murder, the second to a covenant with the now absent father whose animal substitute it was generally forbidden to sacrifice (Freud (1913 [1912-13] pp. 205-6). Enforcing such constraints *post mortem*, these belated acts of contrition point to the fact that '[t]he dead father became stronger than the living one had been' (p. 204). '[I]n accordance with the psychological procedure so familiar to us in psychoanalyses', Freud explains, the sons become subject to "deferred obedience" [*Nachträglichen Gehorsams*]' (p. 205). It would not be wholly unjustified to identify a parallel process at work in *Julius Caesar*. Not only are the Roman plebs steeled into violent action on behalf of Caesar after his funeral and by Antony's reading of his will; his ghost returns to preside over the suicides of Cassius and Brutus by means of the same instruments with which they had killed him (V. iii. 45-6 and 94-6; and V. v. 16-19 and 51-2). It is in death, and only in death, that Caesar acquires the tyrannical power which Cassius had attributed to him in life: the conspirators walking beneath his colossal legs and seeking their own graves.⁷⁰

A question therefore imposes itself—one which is dramatically answered by *Julius Caesar* and which will force us to reconsider Freud's approach in *Totem and Taboo*: namely, that if the deed in either case simply *happens*, if it is complete and meaningful in itself, evacuated of all complexity at the time of its occurrence, how can it possibly have

⁷⁰ It may not be unreasonable to identify an implicit pun in Cassius' earlier speech, the French word 'legs' meaning 'legacy'.

any deferred (*Nachträglich*) effect whatsoever? As Laplanche and Pontalis point out in their dictionary entry for Freud's concept of 'Deferred Action [*Nachträglichkeit/après-coup*]', 'It is not lived experience in general that undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, *whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context*' (1967, p. 112, emphasis added). An event cannot by definition call for deferred revision if it *simply* happens, if it happens simply. It is precisely insofar as an event is not reducible to the materiality of its happening that *Nachträglichkeit* emerges as a necessity. Let us leave *Totem and Taboo* aside for a moment, and attempt to consider how it is that *Julius Caesar* anticipates and responds to this question.

Taking up Laplanche and Pontalis's point, Andrew Benjamin (1992) has identified the forceful connection between two issues which we have followed in the tragedy thus far: translation and the event. He starts out from the early Freudian model of repression at the heart of Laplanche's enterprise: 'A failure of translation—this is what is clinically known as "repression"' (Freud 1985 [1887-1904] p. 208). Benjamin broaches the question, begged by Freud's statement, of what it is in the literal as well as the psychoanalytic sense that gets translated, and of what is it therefore that makes translation necessary. A significant point of contact which Benjamin perceives between the literal and psychological domains is Freud's early co-authored text with Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-5) and the traditional notion of literary translation which in particular Walter Benjamin sought to overturn in his paper 'The Task of the Translator' (1923).⁷¹ Both, Andrew Benjamin argues, are structured by an *archê - telos* polarity; which is to say that both the *Studies* and traditional translation theory presuppose the purity of a source, an origin, an original. The project in the *Studies*

had been to identify the precipitating cause of an hysterical attack (a forgotten traumatic event) and to achieve a cure by causing it to be remembered exactly as it was. The event was not to be the site of reworking or alteration; the cure entailed a return to the event which yielded the event as it actually was (A. Benjamin 1992 pp. 27-8). So too the traditional function of translation: it is not to bring anything new to the original; for its perceived success depends, rather, on its capacity not to impair the unity of what is translated and to be thus absolutely commensurable with it. The cure and the translation are to constitute or enact repetitions without difference, repetitions 'dictated by the reign of the Same' (p. 28).

Now, with Walter Benjamin the direction of the arrow in translation is altered. The translation is seen to be part of the 'afterlife' of the work itself (W. Benjamin 1923 p. 72). Translation *issues from* the original. It is the 'poetic' content of a work, what is elusive, ineffable, what it 'means' beyond the transposability of individual words from one language to another and thus specific to its linguistic provenance, which makes translation necessary (p. 76). Translation ceases to be a supplement of the Same and becomes an art whereby the language of the translation is altered and moved from outside by the absolute linguistic alterity of the original. Its 'nucleus' is 'the element which does not lend itself to translation' (p. 76).⁷² A connection thus emerges with *Nachträglichkeit*. As we witnessed with the case of Emma in the Introduction, within the *neurotica* hypothesis, the trauma of sexual seduction is connected to two radically different experiences of the same occurrence (first: event without affect; second: affect without event). Once Freud poses the seduction

⁷¹ This essay is only cited once by A. Benjamin (p. 38), but Walter Benjamin's influence is clear. 'The Task of the Translator' is discussed at length by Laplanche (1992b) in relation to the field of seduction and the psychoanalytic theory of translation.

theory in all its temporal complexity he must acknowledge that the original event cannot be returned to exactly as it was, cannot be repeated as the Same, because it was never at one with itself in the first place (A. Benjamin p. 31-3). It is what escaped meaningful contextualisation by the child in the scene of seduction which produced a deferred effect. Thus what Andrew Benjamin suggests that Freud and Walter Benjamin recognise is that the complexity of the so-called original, in itself, disrupts the logic of supplementarity: the afterlife of a traumatic event or of the literary work bears witness to that which escapes simple, meaningful containment in the original. Insofar as translation in both the literary and the psychoanalytic sense entails by definition a certain loss of what is translated, the notion of translation presupposes the untranslatable.

As Laplanche says with regard to the beating fantasies: ‘What is *translated*, specifically, is not a natural, or even a historical sign, but a message, a signifier or sequence of signifiers. In order for there to be translation, someone must have meant something’ (Laplanche 1999A [1992b] p. 157). The point for Laplanche, of course, is that messages always say more than their addresser means to say by them (p. 158), always carry a content which is not containable either by the receiver or by the emitter himself. They always demand an active process of reception and thus translation precisely because something in the signifying act exceeds incorporation into the manifest register of intentionality.

To return to *Julius Caesar*, is it not the case that the conspirators’ deed is, as much as anything, intended as an act of signification? There is a deed in itself certainly, but also a message. The murder scene really is a *scene* insofar as it contains an intentional significance beyond the sheer fact of Caesar’s death. ‘Let’s be sacrificers and not butchers’

⁷² It should be noted that Laplanche (1992b) distances himself from W. Benjamin’s ‘messianic’ proposition that as well as translated and translation, there is a third term, that of a ‘pure language’ where the two

means: 'Let's be *perceived as* sacrificers and not butchers'. To repeat, if it were unconditionally true that the abuse of the time could not *not* bring about Caesar's death, if it were a deed wholly without contingency and forced by the absolute inevitability of law or fate, there could be no possibility of its being misconstrued. That possibility, ever present to the conspirators, means that the deed must *contain* meaning in both senses of the word: it cannot be an act pure and simple but must carry an implicit message to its witnesses; and the scope for construal of that message must be brutally limited. The murder is not (simply) the inescapable redress of a wrong done to Rome. Brutus fashions it as a signifying gesture to Rome which attempts to communicate what Rome 'really' is (a Republic), what Caesar 'really' is (a tyrant), what the conspirators 'really' are (sacrificers). For none of these things has been certain. Brutus' very need to give meaning to the deed testifies at once to the requirement that the murder be an act of signification, and thus, in spite of itself, to the possibility that it might always say more than it should.

We are not positing the presence of an unconscious in Brutus and the rest. We are neither suggesting that the conspirators' hatred of Caesar amounts to some crude 'repression' of what they know, nor that the message of the deed carries a 'repressed' content in the clinical sense of the term. We are, however, arguing that Laplanche, and Andrew Benjamin after him, help us to identify the procedure by which Shakespeare dramatises the scene of Caesar's murder not as one merely available for retrospective constructions, but as one which contains within it as it happens a complexity of which it cannot and will not in its aftermath, or its 'afterlife', ever be rid. The scene of Julius Caesar's murder demands translation.

Let us now turn to the scene in Shakespeare's tragedy, in order to explain exactly how and why. The immediate problem which confronts any reader is the question of where and in what precisely 'the deed' terminates. The brute fact of Caesar's death is accomplished, it happens, with a straightforward stage direction: *They stab Caesar* (III. i. 76 SD). With one exception (which we will come to shortly) Caesar's death takes place in an eerie, even meaningless silence. However brief the stage direction, the action it demands entails thirty-three knife-woundings (V. i. 52), and amounts to an uncomfortably prolonged and purely visual period of stage time. Within seconds the stage is crawling with shocked and panicked Senators making their exit. But, the conspirators left alone, they go on to perform an extraordinary ritual with the corpse:

Brutus: Stoop, Romans, stoop,
And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood
Up to the elbows and besmear our swords.
Then walk we forth into the market-place,
And waving our red weapons o'er our heads
Let's all cry, 'Peace! Freedom and Liberty'.

Cassius: Stoop, then, and wash.

(III. i. 105-111)

A message: awash with the blood of Caesar the conspirators are to present themselves to the citizens in the market-place; and to that extent the ritual figures as a kind of large-scale pun: the murderers are to be re(a)d like sacrificers.⁷³ The ritual is wholly Shakespeare's addition to Caesar's story, but the conspirators' self-daubing in fact takes its character from Plutarch's description of the goat sacrifices at the Lupercal (*Romulus* XXI 4).⁷⁴ In their borrowing of the ancient ritual, here at the base of the (br)other Pompey's statue, the conspirators might be seen to be positioning themselves as the actors of a Roman rite/right,

⁷³ Cf. Antony's comment to the corpse that the conspirators are 'Signed in [i.e. made into signs by] thy spoil and crimsoned in thy lethe', III. i. 206.

⁷⁴ On this point see Conn Liebler (1995), pp. 100-1.

subverting the celebration procedure established in honour of Rome's first monarch and turning it against his new incarnation in the name of the Republic. For the conspirators the murder of Caesar is and must be a sacrifice. Their 'deed', their 'lofty scene' would not be complete without it.

Yet it is for exactly the same reason that this message, this *scene* of murder, will always bear within it the possibility of, even the call for an alternative construal, no less than did Calphurnia's nightmare of which, after all, it is no more than a literalisation. The scene of sacrificial ritual which is necessitated by the prematurity of the deed is thoroughly haunted and compromised by it. When Antony enters, the first witness of any gravity, he demands 'reasons/Why and wherein Caesar was dangerous' (III. i. 221-2). Brutus immediately concedes: 'Or else this were a savage spectacle' (III. i. 223). Whether the murder amounts to sacrifice or to savage butchery is wholly dependent on whether it can be proved that Caesar represented a tyrannical danger. The possibility that the deed could represent one thing or another thus rests on what is within Shakespeare's text a fundamental impossibility. The ritual scene is not and cannot be reducible to the intentional significance which motivates it. 'Or else this were a savage spectacle': the status, the meaning of the murder-scene will always have yet to be determined. It is not that the scene on stage can be understood as sacrifice *or* butchery. It is, *as it happens*, not at one with itself; it will never have been unless or until the danger of Caesar were unequivocally established. What makes the meaning of 'sacrifice' necessary is equally what prohibits it from being 'sacrifice' pure and simple, even as it is given. The ritual (as message, and *qua* message) is perpetually inhabited and corrupted by an inaccessible kernel that would be the truth of what Caesar was or had ambitions to become. The two diametrically opposed funeral orations before the

people which will shortly follow the assassination are in no way heterogeneous to it. Their very possibility (as diametrically opposed) is already present in the scene; the latter is already heterogeneous to itself.

The blood-ritual entails and brings us immediately to the metadramatic passage which we cited near the outset:

Cassius: Stoop, then, and wash. How many ages hence
Shall this, our lofty scene be acted over
In states unborn and accents yet unknown?

Brutus: How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport
That now on Pompey's basis lies along,
No worthier than the dust?

Cassius: So oft as that shall be
So often shall the knot of us be called
The men who gave their country liberty.

(III. i. 111-118)

Are the audience watching one of the belated dramatic repetitions (actings-over) forecast at the 'real' murder scene, or the 'real' inaugural moment of that forecasting? It is important that this remarkable, self-reflexive moment of 'putting into the abyss' which aims to disrupt the polarity between the 'then' of the historical murder and the 'now' of its (re-)enactment, not be understood as one of mimetic naivety. For it is, paradoxically, in the very appeal to mimesis that the notion of a *simple* origin fully disappears. To suggest that the text works only to generate the illusion that what the audience witness onstage is no more than a pure repetition of the original historical murder scene as a repetition of the Same, would be to ignore the complexity of what is already at stake. The possibility of a simple repetition and an original to be simply repeated is thrown into doubt by the irreducibility of the conspirators' ritual practice. If we accept the historical and dramatic illusion that we are watching the 'original' we should have to concede that it is already not the same as itself. If we accept the mimetic illusion that we are witnessing one of the deferred repetitions

forecast at the ‘original’ scene, then of what exactly would it allow us to say that it is a repetition? Sacrifice? Butchery? The more mimetically alike we suppose Shakespeare’s text to be to what it ‘repeats’ (or claims to be repeating), the further away recedes the possibility of what it ‘repeats’ having had, even as it happened, any finally determinable meaning whatever. That of which *Julius Caesar* posits itself as a repetition, by positing itself in these lines *as* a repetition, cannot have been unequivocally meaningful in the instant that it ‘actually’ happened. For what the text ‘repeats’, or claims to, is merely and exactly the conspirators’ forecast of future repetitions. If the text is supposed mimetically to act over ‘what actually happened’, then the ‘what actually happened’ that it repeats is not the *meaning* of the assassination, but *the conspirators’ desire for the assassination to have a meaning*: so oft as this scene is repeated, Cassius predicts (is, paradoxically, repeated as predicting),

So often shall the knot of us be called
The men who gave their country liberty.

For the murder-scene to be repeatable, as Cassius wishes, as the moment Rome received its liberty, Caesar’s tyranny would have to have been irrefutable (‘or else this were a savage spectacle’). What Cassius and the conspirators desire to have accomplished (desire to be re(a)d as having accomplished) must have been unequivocally accomplished for it to be repeated as such. But this is not the case. What it is possible to re-enact, to ‘repeat’, is not the greatness of the deed but the intention that the deed be great. The materiality of their words and their deeds is repeatable (is ‘repeated’ in the ‘now’ of Shakespeare’s drama), but their ultimate meaning (‘now’ and therefore ‘then’, ‘then’ and therefore ‘now’) remains unavailable, deferred—and will continue to be, however many times it (the drama and the original it just ‘repeats’) is repeated and re-performed. The metadramatic device, far from

posturing to give us direct access to ‘what actually happened’, opens up the possibility that ‘what actually happened’ (what is now ‘repeated’) was already yet-to-be-determined at the moment of its occurrence.

Note, moreover, that the conspirators are dramatised (‘repeated’) by Shakespeare not only forecasting the repetition of their action in posterity, but also, in the most literal sense, its *translation*: in states unborn and into accents yet unknown.⁷⁵ The murder-scene of *Julius Caesar* is figured as a repetition and a translation: Brutus and Cassius are ‘repeated’, dramatically, forecasting dramatic repetition, and forecasting, in translation (in English), the necessity of their being translated (from Latin). The blood-ritual *is* repeated (‘now’), the conspirators’ words *are* translated (into English), but that is the limit and precisely the problem. Repetition and translation will not, do not in the repetition and translation that is *Julius Caesar*, amount to the repetition and translation of *the* meaning of the murder, only of the material actions and words surrounding it which seek to give it *the* meaning of sacrificial tyrannicide. Shakespeare’s metadrama seems to say that the deed can be repeated, the scene reconstructed, the words spoken translated, but that this alone will not give us access to what the scene means. The effort to define the murder is repeatable and translatable, but in being repeated and translated it will always and only reappear as an effort and not a definition, not a meaning which is wholly at one with itself. We know why, of course: because the claim of sacrifice rests on an impossible foundation, no less than does that of butchery. It is not without significance, then, that to that extent what Shakespeare repeats and translates (claims to repeat and translate) entails an untranslated remainder which emerges out of the prolonged silence of the stabbings:

Caska: Speak hands for me! *They stab Caesar*.
Caesar: *Et tu, Brute?*—Then fall Caesar. *Dies*.

(III. i. 76-7)

Caesar's last words, which entail a shift into Latin then from Latin into English, are the pivotal moment of the tragedy. What is translated, again, preserves the meaning of the murder in suspension. 'Then fall Caesar': does 'Then' signal Caesar's abject horror that even Brutus' love and loyalty are not sufficient to restrain him from butchery, or the concession that if (even) beloved Brutus seeks his death, then his death is inevitable and deserved?⁷⁶ Sacrifice or butchery? Everything would hang on the significance of the '*Et tu, Brute?*' Plutarch has him say nothing to Brutus, and Shakespeare chooses not to reproduce here Suetonius' proposition of Caesar's explicit claim to paternity.⁷⁷ His own choice⁷⁸ is not difficult to translate in any literal sense; and if it were materially translated, word for word, it would bring us no closer to the truth of Caesar's understanding of the event. But in choosing to render the first of Caesar's last words *à traduire*, in a text which in part poses itself as a translation, Shakespeare, like his Caska, relinquishes any hubristic effort exhaustively to 'tell the manner' of Caesar's death. The deed is shown to bear at its very core as it happens and as it is repeated a kernel which cannot be translated, and will not be in any re-enactment (repetition) or indeed translation of Shakespeare's tragedy. The possibility of unequivocal meaning remains suspended from the scene, deferred from the moment it takes place.

⁷⁵ 'Accents' = languages, III. i. 111-3 n.

⁷⁶ Cf. III. i. 77 n.

⁷⁷ See note 62 above.

The possibility of 'deferred obedience'; or, interpreting Freud with Freud and Shakespeare

The rhetorical battle between Brutus and Antony at Caesar's funeral, which precedes and ultimately inaugurates the violence of the Civil War that will take up the whole of Acts IV and V, amounts to a struggle to claim access to the truth of Caesar's desire. Both statesmen vie for the Romans' support of contradictory perspectives, neither of which is, finally, exclusive of the other. The murder having been premature, it is the always elusive question of Caesar's erstwhile 'ambition' which must be proved or disproved for the assassination to be received as an event worthy of celebration or of mourning. Immediately before the battle of Philippi, as they discuss the possibility of their own deaths, Brutus tells Cassius: 'this same day/Must end the work the Ides of March begun' (V. i. 112-3). The Civil War is the product of the assassination; and what is at stake in victory, for either side, is a means of settling just what the assassination meant: politically justified sacrifice or savage and indefensible butchery. The Ides of March are not yet gone; 'tyrannicide' is neither done nor done with. The assassination does not put an end to tyranny: without tyranny ever having been hatched, the assassination 'begins' a large-scale and even bloodier contention over precisely what it signified, and precisely what had been inside the shell.

What we have said of the assassination amounts to the simple fact that there can be no single interpretation made of it, since it depended on a particular interpretation of Caesar—not a wholly illegitimate one, but one which had first to exclude or sacrifice another which was no less justifiable. Tyranny is something Caesar might-always-have and

⁷⁸ It is true that the phrase was not uncommon in the period, though the first use of it appears to have been in Shakespeare's own *Richard Duke of York* (3 *Henry VI*), V. i. 81, where it already appears...untranslated.

might-always-not-have attained: occurring before either possibility can be affirmed conclusively, the murderous deed will not itself permit of one interpretation at the expense of another. What necessitates the conspirators' message, and that of Antony to the plebs at the funeral, is this foundational aporia which also makes neither adequate in itself or even to itself. The Civil War, which one way or another is supposed to end the work begun by the Ides of March, constitutes an extension of this battle for hermeneutic dominance. In this final section, I want to focus on two inseparable parts of what we might call Julius Caesar's afterlife: his ghost and his will. It will be seen that they haunt the conspirators' and the pro-Caesareans' projects respectively, and render the attempt to secure the meaning of the assassination interminable, whoever should win the day at Philippi.

In the deed was a 'beginning'. Antony, the plebs and Octavius call specifically for 'revenge' (III. i. 270; III. ii. 198 and 236; V. i. 53), and the deaths of Brutus and Cassius will indeed be figured as acts which will lay to rest Caesar's unsettled spirit (V. iii. 45-6; V. v. 51-2). The assassination amounts to the incurring rather than the calling in of a debt. By virtue of the prematurity of the deed, the debt of Caesar's tyrannical transgression will always have yet to be incurred. If Caesar's spirit and the pro-Caesarean faction seek vengeance, it is because the deed itself, in its premature moment, was not unequivocally justifiable: just like the message of 'sacrifice' there would be no need, no call for the deaths of Brutus and Cassius were their action nothing but a tyrannicide from which Rome could only suck reviving blood. Their deaths are figured as the deferred effect of a deed whose significance was not resolutely definable; they are hunted and haunted, quite literally, by what their deed could not contain.

The upshot of this, as we suggested earlier, is that Caesar becomes more powerful in death than he had been in life—but not just more powerful: his returning spirit manifests the very power of which earlier he had only ever vainly spoken. If Caesar had, in life, identified himself with God, the giver of the law whose glance alone could make danger vanish, then the revenge taken on the two chief conspirators, whose danger he had dismissed, is threatened and accomplished with the dissipation of their own eyesight. The ghost does not physically appear at the site of Brutus' death, but the latter acknowledges, even as he asks for assistance in his suicide, that the earlier visitations had been harbingers of the death he is about to face:

The ghost of Caesar hath appeared to me
Two several times by night: at Sardis once,
And this last night, here in Philippi fields:
I know my hour is come.

(V. v. 16-9)

Significantly, we see nothing of the second night-time encounter, but the first, which Shakespeare does represent, takes place in Brutus' tent as he tries to read a book:

Let me see: is not the leaf turned down
Where I left reading? Here it is, I think.
Enter the Ghost of Caesar
How ill this taper burns. Ha! Who comes here?
I think it is the weakness of mine eyes
That shapes this monstrous apparition.
It comes upon me: art thou anything?
Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil?
That mak'st my blood cold, and my hair to stare?
Speak to me what thou art.

Ghost: Thy evil spirit, Brutus.

Brutus: Why com'st thou?

Ghost: To tell thee thou shalt see me at Philippi

Brutus: Well: then I shall see thee again.

Ghost: Ay, at Philippi.

Brutus: Why, I will see thee at Philippi then:

Now I have taken heart thou vanishest.

(IV. iii. 271-85)

Once he finds, or thinks he has found, his page Brutus cannot see to read ('How ill this taper burns'). He believes, for a moment, that his eyes project the apparition; but on the contrary it is the apparition which dictates what he sees. Its appearance appears to be redundant: it comes to tell him that he must prepare to 'see me' (at Philippi). It appears, it seems, only to warn of its own reappearance. But in what must that 'reappearance' consist? The stage direction makes clear that the apparition is the ghost of Caesar, and, as we have noted, Brutus will confirm his recognition of the fact in the seconds before his death. Yet here, at Sardis, he makes no mention of the likeness of the spirit to his once-beloved Julius. He only questions what the 'thing' might be (276-9).⁷⁹ 'Well: then I shall see thee again'/'Why, I will see thee at Philippi then': oscillating between these not-quite-identical rhyming lines is a crucial difference suggested in the ambiguity of Ghost's threat. According to Plutarch, the 'monstrous spirit' appeared at Philippi 'in the self same shape and form' that it took at Sardis (North's *Brutus*, p. 183). With Shakespeare's Brutus so visually impaired here, the Ghost of the tragedy implies another possibility. '[T]hou shalt see me at Philippi', says both: you will see me *return* at Philippi; and, no less forcefully, you who cannot see me clearly now, will *see me* (see me truly, recognise me) for the first time only at the second visit. During the encounter at Sardis, Brutus takes heart, and the Ghost 'vanishes', he says, echoing Caesar's erstwhile verb for the his eyes' power to banish

⁷⁹ Cf. *Hamlet*: the second line spoken after the Ghost's first appearance in the text is Barnardo's recognition that it comes 'In the same figure like the King that's dead' (I. i. 44). Similarly, in a passage comparable to Brutus' rapid questioning in lines 276-9, Hamlet, in spite of his confusion does not hesitate to give the alien thing a familiar name (I. iv. 40-5):

Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane!

danger. Yet after the later visitation, Brutus will have recognised the apparition to be and to have been Caesar, and will as a consequence have lost heart altogether. Brutus senses death and embraces it having *seen* (again) and recognised (for the first time) the ghost of Caesar: that is how he knows his hour is come. The second encounter, which Shakespeare chooses to withhold from the eyes of the audience and which remains wholly mysterious within the play, literalises the threat which Caesar had purloined from Exodus: ‘there shall no man see me and live’.

Cassius’ death is comparable. On witnessing his corpse, Brutus muses:

O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet.
Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords
Into our own proper entrails

(V. iii. 94-6)

Cassius has committed suicide, but Caesar, *post mortem*, has had a hand in the act. Cassius never sees the ghost, as Brutus does; and as with Brutus it is not visibly present during his suicide. But its presence is felt precisely through the question of vision which arises in the moments before Cassius’ death. He sends Titinius out to ‘regard’ the situation on the field (V. iii. 21), and orders Pindarus up the hill to ‘behold’ Titinius’ progress (V. iii. 33).

Cassius determines to end his own life on the basis of Pindarus’ misperception that Titinius is taken captive by the enemy. Why this small chain of substitute eyes, one soldier dispatched to observe, another to observe him? Because, says Cassius, ‘[m]y sight was ever thick’ (V. iii. 21). Mighty Caesar’s belated revenge is attained because Cassius’ eyes fail him. Hearing the ill-report, Cassius orders Pindarus, and thereby himself, to ‘behold no more’ (V. iii. 33). Mediated and corrupted as it is, a scene is presented to Cassius which he cannot see and live: ‘O coward that I am, to live so long,/To see my best friend ta’en before my face’ (V. iii. 34-5).

If we are to cite these deaths as instances of what Freud calls 'deferred obedience', we must accept a certain discrepancy between the procedure dramatised by Shakespeare and the account given by Freud of *Nachträglichen Gehorsams* in *Totem and Taboo*.

Revenge, by definition, is the righting of a wrong. 'Then fall Caesar': if this were to have signified only his acceptance that his death was deserved, he would never have needed to return as revenant. The tyrannical power which accrues to Caesar in seeking his ghostly revenge is a measure of the tyranny he had neither attained nor resolutely signalled that it was his desire illegitimately to attain in life. His avenging strength *post mortem* (like the very presence of the pro-Caesarean faction) testifies (though only in part, as we will see) to his having never acquired by the time of the assassination the status for the rest of Rome, in its entirety, which he had for Brutus, Cassius and the rest. For Freud, on the other hand, the death of the primal father is an unequivocal event. If the father becomes still more tyrannical in death, it is, it seems, no more than a continuation and confirmation of the tyrant that he just was in life. It will be seen shortly why Freud's model is problematic, and first of all for Freud himself.

Before getting to this, it must be emphasised that the discrepancy is not total. It would be inconsistent with everything we have said thus far to accept that the ghostly afterlife of Caesar testifies to no more than the always-possible injustice of the deed. If the deaths of Brutus and Cassius signal the victory of the pro-Caesarean faction, the work begun by the Ides of March is nevertheless not (simply) ended; for Caesar's tyrannical revenge is no less equivocal than the deed it avenges. Departing from Plutarch, Shakespeare identifies and personifies the revenant: the tyrannical ghost of Caesar is, after all... *of* Caesar. There is, in Shakespeare, a certain paradoxical continuity between always-

potential-(non)-tyrant who is prematurely put to death, and the daemonic figure who enacts vengeance.⁸⁰ Why should it be that 'revenge', which presupposes injustice (for Caesar never *was* a tyrant) should be overseen by the tyrannical spirit of a victim whose supporters—those who launch military 'revenge' in his name—insist that he had no tyrannical ambition? If Caesar's ghostly 'revenge' testifies to the possibility of an injustice done to Caesar, does not Shakespeare's characterisation of the ghost not just as Caesar but, more specifically, as Caesar the tyrant, demand that we understand the haunting of the conspirators to be itself somehow haunted? The afterlife of Caesar gets us no closer to the truth of Caesar's alleged ambition (or therefore to the truth of the deed, its justice or injustice) than did his and Antony's theatrics during the pseudo-coronation before the plebs. Its characterisation will not allow us to understand its significance in an either/or fashion. It is not, *qua* revenge, a belated testament only to the injustice of the deed: Caesar's avenging ghost, in its very tyranny, continues to testify to the might-always/might-always-not which marked Caesar in life. As revenger—as tyrannical revenger—Caesar continues, *post mortem*, to resist simple interpretation.

This fact places the project of the pro-Caesarean faction on no less 'slippery ground' than that of the conspirators. The assassination was, specifically, undecidable: if it was not unequivocally justifiable, then by the same token, neither was it unequivocally unjustifiable, as Antony must attempt to make the people of Rome believe it was. Indeed his brilliantly manipulative speech to the plebs at Caesar's funeral will be marked by an ineluctable paradox that preserves Caesar's will—his desire, his ambition—as wholly

⁸⁰ Note too that it *is* the ghost which enacts vengeance. Caesar's spirit is spared the usual impotence of the revenge-ghost who must call upon the living to requite the crime which cut him off in life. The pro-Caesarean faction certainly inaugurate Civil War, but it is Caesar's ghost which ultimately drives his erstwhile vanquishers to their deaths.

unreadable, even and especially as Antony reads the last will and testament of his colleague, the posthumous *effect* of which document is at once and irreducibly a refutation and a confirmation of ‘ambition’.

In spite and because of what Antony says to his auditors, standing before the bleeding piece of earth that is now Caesar, he does speak to disprove what Brutus has spoken (III. ii. 101). As Freud points out in the *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Antony’s technique is to make himself understood by insisting, over-insisting, on the reverse of his repeated refrain: ‘For Brutus is an honourable man;/So are they all, all honourable men [...] And Brutus is an honourable man [...]’ etc. (III. ii. 83-7; Freud 1905 p. 113):

You all did see, that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him the kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And sure he is an honourable man.

(III. ii. 96-100)

His friends and countrymen accept the subtly articulated charge without question: ‘Mark ye his words? He would not take the crown;/Therefore ‘tis certain he was not ambitious’ (III. ii. 113-4). Antony then drops like a piece of bait the real proof of Caesar’s modesty and non-tyranny—the issue of the will:

But here’s a parchment, with the seal of Caesar.
I found it in his closet. ‘Tis his will [...]
I must not read it.
It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you.
You are not wood, you are not stones, but men:
And being men, hearing the will of Caesar,
It will inflame you, it will make you mad [...]
I have o’ershot myself to tell you of it.
I fear I wrong the honourable men
Whose daggers have stabbed Caesar: I do fear it.

(III. ii. 129-153)

Passed from Antony to the eager plebs the word 'will', 'the favourite Shakespearean phallic pun' as Richard Wilson puts it, is picked up and repeated twenty-seven times in just thirty lines (Wilson 1996 p. 25). Antony refrains awhile from revealing its contents, choosing first to ventriloquise the cuts in Caesar's mantle, reconstructing the bloody murder scene as one of treacherous butchery, evacuated of all sacrificial meaning (III. ii. 167-190). But, as if to gesture towards a revelation of truth, his dramatic overture to the reading of the last testament is an unveiling of the corpse:

Kind souls, what weep you when you but behold
 Our Caesar's vesture wounded? Look you here,
 Here is himself, marred as you see with traitors.
1 Pleb: O piteous spectacle!
2 Pleb: O noble Caesar!
3 Pleb: O woeful day!
4 Pleb: O traitors, villains!
1 Pleb: O most bloody sight!
2 Pleb: We will be revenged!
 (III. ii. 193-8)

Caesar's naked will is being laid bare. It is not, Antony urges the Romans, I who speak, but Caesar: his 'wounds, poor dumb mouths/ [...] speak for me' (III. ii. 218-9), just as he says the words of Caesar's will alone would be enough to inflame them against the 'honourable' 'traitors' who stabbed Caesar. It is not I but Caesar, in his naked bleeding body and in his last signed text, who speaks posthumously.⁸¹ Here, Antony declares, already fighting to restrain the crowd, is the real reason '[w]herein Caesar hath deserved your loves':

To every Roman citizen he gives,
 To every several man, seventy-five drachmas.

⁸¹ The phallic pun which connects the text of the 'will' to the bleeding, naked body may in part be determined by Plutarch's claim that 'Brutus [...] gave [Caesar] one wound about the privities' (North's *Caesar* p. 101). There is no indication in Shakespeare's text of the bodily location of Brutus' attack, except, perhaps, for Antony's famous description of the castrative gash made by Brutus as 'the unkindest cut of all' ('cut' = slang for 'cunt') (III. ii. 181).

2 *Pleb*: Most noble Caesar, we'll revenge his death.

3 *Pleb*: O royal Caesar!

Antony: Hear me with patience.

All: Peace ho.

Antony: Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,
His private arbours and new planted orchards,
On this side Tiber. He hath left them you
And to your heirs forever: common pleasures
To walk abroad and recreate yourselves.
Here was a Caesar: when comes such another?

1 *Pleb*: Never, never. Come, away, away.
We'll burn his body in the holy place,
And with the brands fire all the traitors' houses.
Take up the body.

2 *Pleb*: Go fetch fire.

3 *Pleb*: Pluck down benches.

4 *Pleb*: Pluck down forms, windows, anything.

(III. ii. 229-50)

The first time Caesar is seen on Shakespeare's stage in Act I during the festivities of the Lupercal, he is concerned that he has no legitimate son, and therefore no heir (I. ii. 1-9). By the time of his death everything has been decided: Caesar renders what is Caesar's to the people of Rome.⁸² We mentioned above Miola's proposition that, as Antony wishes, the content of the will militates against the claim of Caesar's tyranny. 'In direct contrast to the typical tyrant's greed', argues Miola, 'Caesar's posthumous generosity unites all Romans as familial legatees and characterises him as the magnanimous *pater patriae*' (Miola 1985 p. 282). True as it may be that the will brings to the fore a magnanimity which would be thoroughly untyrannical, it and Miola's proposition are heavily freighted with contradiction. There is an insoluble difference between what the content of the will says and what it enacts. As Toubiana (1988) has pointed out in his chapter on Caesar's testament:

⁸² Note that Shakespeare underlines this point heavily. The factual content of the will comes directly from Plutarch (North's *Caesar* p. 137), but Shakespeare chooses never explicitly to mention Caesar's wish that his

[In ancient Rome] lorsque l'héritier est étranger à la famille, il est habituellement adopté; le personne adoptée porte alors les *tria nomina* de l'adoptant et, en même temps que les biens, il hérite symboliquement des noms et des qualités du testateur [...] Le testament place le peuple, en le désignant comme héritier, *dans une position filiale* et c'est pourquoi [...] la journée des Ides de mars devient sacrée et sanctifiée comme 'journée parricide'.

(p. 48, emphasis added)⁸³

In the moment Caesar's naked will becomes seen and known it folds back upon itself, concealing the final truth of what it reveals. As Antony produces this final piece of evidence of Caesar's innocence of the charge of tyranny, of never having had the ambitions for which he was assassinated, Caesar becomes, makes himself, *pater patriae*: 'O royal Caesar!' The ultimate and unmediated 'proof' of Caesar's never having been illegitimately ambitious for the crown—and there can be no doubting his material generosity to Rome—is covertly and *at the same time* a means of accession to it that does without, even circumvents the constitutional process of the Senate. Even as it gestures towards, and effects an equitable redistribution of the things which are Caesar's, it removes Caesar from any relation of equality and fraternity to the people. Caesar makes himself the peerless, br(other)less, father of Rome in the very same move by which his non-tyranny is affirmed before and accepted by the people. The text of the will is an oxymoron, and irreducibly so: it preserves the question of Caesar's ambition as a question. As a gesture it is both an independent and unconstitutional bid for the crown on Caesar's part, and proof of Caesar's never having wished to make such a bid; both a magnanimous act and a belated, kingly call for obedience. Nothing which we have seen of Shakespeare's living Caesar, and nothing in

principal legatee in fact be his great-nephew Octavius. Instead, he shows Antony and Octavius intending to 'cut off' *for themselves* 'some charge in the legacies' (IV. i. 8-9).

⁸³ It should be mentioned that the first passage which I have elided in the above citation specifically concerns Octavius as Caesar's symbolic *enfant adoptif*—an issue which, as I have suggested in the previous note, Shakespeare's version of the story chooses to submerge somewhat beneath the more strongly emphasised issue of Caesar's posthumous 'adoption' of the whole of Rome.

the Scenes which follow the funeral, allows us access to the ‘will’ behind the will, to any one true animating purpose for which it was written.

If Shakespeare refuses to represent Caesar as an unequivocal tyrant in life, he is consistent in maintaining the truth of Caesar’s ambition as elusive, even in and beyond death. Neither those who rejoice in his passing, nor those who mourn it can exorcise the undecidable remainder which compromises their respective positions in relation to the dead. Celebration or condemnation alone cannot do justice to the irreducible complexity of the deed. Neither is illegitimate and neither is sufficient in itself. The work begun on the Ides of March was interpretative: its rhetorical and its bloody continuation will testify not to what Caesar *was*, but only to both what he might-always and might-always-not have been. The deed itself will continue to resist any attempt to make it proper to itself, one thing or another, sacrifice or butchery.

In closing, then, we return to the text with which we first began: *Totem and Taboo*. Freud never once raises any question concerning the ‘will’ of the primal tyrant father—*his* intention, *his* desire does not figure at all. If, as Harold Bloom claims, the text can be read as a rewriting of *Julius Caesar*, then it is one which writes out any complexity on the part of the alleged ‘tyrant’. As Laplanche has stressed, in a passage which was evoked in the previous chapter, Freud’s ipsocentrism habitually and characteristically leads him to deny complexity to the parent figures whom he invokes—in the case histories, throughout *Moses and Monotheism*, and especially in regard to the primal father: ‘The father of the horde communicates nothing; he has no unconscious’ (Laplanche 1999A [1995] p. 190). Let us reiterate that when Freud poses the question of why it should be that in the ritual killing of the totem animal (the father’s substitute) the band of brothers at once rejoice at the

repetition of their deed and mourn over it as well, he proposes that it is the result of '[t]he ambivalent emotional attitude which to this day characterises the father-complex in our children [...]' (Freud 1913 [1912-3] p. 202). '[The sons] hated their father', he says, '[...] but they loved and admired him too' (p. 204). Yet, Freud goes on, '[w]e know nothing of the origin of this ambivalence' (p. 219). He does not rule out the possibility that it is instinctual and essential, 'a fundamental phenomenon of our emotional life'; but he also advances, somewhat vaguely, the more suggestive proposition that an answer might be sought in the possibility that ambivalence is not originary but was 'acquired by the human race in connection with their father complex' (pp. 219-20).⁸⁴

Freud's speculation ceases and he moves on. But his second proposition perhaps allows us to question, with Freud, his own procedure elsewhere in the text. Ambivalence is always on the side of the sons. He describes their 'ambivalent attitude *towards* the father', their 'current[s] of feeling *towards* him' (p. 211 and 207, emphases added), but never anything from the father towards the sons, except jealous aggression and tyranny. But does not the ambivalence of the sons indicate a blind-spot on Freud's part with regard to the primal father, rather than a predicament of whose origin we can only say we know nothing? If the sons feel ambivalently towards their father, is it not because he will have behaved not with unequivocal tyranny but at least somehow ambivalently towards them? Must there not, *in the first place*, have been ambivalence coming *from* the parental other *towards* the sons? If he was loved as well as hated, then jealous aggression and tyranny cannot mark the absolute limit of his attitude towards them, as Freud wants to insist. For them to need to rejoice as well as to mourn, after the event, there must have first been something about the

⁸⁴ Laplanche (1999A [1992d]) takes Freud to task for the more general tendency in *Totem and Taboo* to settle for the option of instinctual ambivalence. See esp. pp. 245-8.

father the termination of which is a cause for rejoicing, *and* something of which to mourn the loss.

Nachträglichen Gehorsams: what *Julius Caesar* dramatises is the complexity of an event of ‘tyrannicide’, which Freud cannot perceive in his own reconstruction of the drama of the primal horde. In order for there to be any ‘deferred obedience’ in the Freudian drama, the event which he describes cannot in itself and as it happened have objectively constituted a ‘tyrannicide’ pure and simple, cannot have been ‘lived experience’ unalloyed in the first instance by guilt, uncompromised by interpretative embellishment and ‘thought’. It must always have been tyrannicide and not-tyrannicide, necessary and excessive. How else could any *Nachträglichkeit* be possible? The complexity of the primal father cannot, without remainder, be scotomised any more successfully than can Caesar’s by Brutus before and during the murder or even by Antony at the funeral. The afterlife of the one thought to be the ‘tyrant’—which emerges in mourning, rejoicing, civil war, revenge—is not heterogeneous to what his death entailed, but testifies, rather, to the heterogeneity of that event to itself.

* * *

Julius Caesar is at once the most ‘Freudian’ and the most ‘unFreudian’ of texts. Certainly it is one which begs comparison with *Totem and Taboo*, or with which *Totem and Taboo* itself tacitly begs comparison. But moreover, what it dramatises, ‘repeats’, ‘translates’ and fails to ‘translate’ is the possibility of an occurrence whose logic Freud had already long claimed to have abandoned by 1912: namely the occurring of that which is not

at home with itself in the first instance, which bears within it an otherness of which it cannot simply be rid. Not only refusing *either* to condemn *or* to condone (to rejoice or to mourn) the assassination of Caesar, Shakespeare represents it as an event the status and the meaning of which never was reducible only to the material reality in which it consisted.

To say so does not amount to the charge that *Julius Caesar* is somehow apolitical—a refusal to come down on one side or the other in a period in which the radical posture of tragedy has been regarded as an active intervention in a political scene whose ‘Father’ would soon indeed be ‘cut off’. On the contrary. What the text brings to the ‘tyrannicide debate’ is the very question of the undecidability which makes possible ‘debate’ per se. Complex, not the same as itself in the very first instance, the event, like the experience of trauma, makes possible and necessary the deferred and constant returns to it of which Shakespeare’s text is only one of innumerable instances. The posture of coming down simplistically on one side only will always be haunted by the unassimilable remainder of what it must sacrifice from the basis of its own interpretation.

Chapter Three

Hamlet: Too much in the sun

The modern subject is he who feels free to forget the dead.

Ferdinand Tönnies, *Custom: An Essay on Social Codes*

The madness of Oedipus has become Western reason.

Jean Joseph Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher*

Doubt that the sun doth move.

Hamlet

The sins of the father

In the early portions of our previous two chapters, and with reference to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, we have so far followed Freud's identifications with the tragic figures of Sophocles' Oedipus and Shakespeare's Brutus—each a parricide in his own way. I wish to inaugurate this final chapter by pointing to a third, comparable identification on Freud's part. We are concerned, of course, with Hamlet who, like Oedipus, is a bereaved son—though it will take us most of the chapter to grasp precisely what is or could be described as 'parricidal' in the orientation of this fatherless hero.

First, it is worth briefly recapitulating the familiar interpretation of *Hamlet* which Freud proposes in 1900. It is little different from the one he offers Fliess in October 1897: that the play bears within it, has as its undisclosed nucleus, the Oedipal themes of parricide and incest. Yet in 1900, Freud is keen to stress the historical separation between Sophocles' tragedy and Shakespeare's: whereas in the former the infantile desires which supposedly

motivate it are ‘brought out into the open and realized as they would be in a dream’ (p. 366), *Hamlet*’s libidinal nucleus remains undisclosed because it is a *modern* play. We learn of the hero’s Oedipal conflict only ‘from its inhibiting consequences’ (p. 366). It is ‘repressed—just as in the case of a neurosis’ (p. 366). For Freud, this fact represents the difference in mental life between the separate epochs of civilisation in which the two tragedies were produced. To paraphrase a passage from *Totem and Taboo* which we cited in the previous chapter, we might say that with *Oedipus* thought turns directly into action: the hero just is driven to carry out parricide and incest. ‘[T]he more modern tragedy’, however, bears the marks of what Freud calls ‘the secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind’ (1900 pp. 367 and 366): everything Oedipal remains concealed. We are confronted only with the peculiar fact that Hamlet cannot motivate himself to undertake the task set for him by his father. What is concealed by the play, and what, Freud argues, has remained concealed from its readers for so long, is that Claudius has not only taken the political and familial place once occupied by Old Hamlet: he has also usurped young Hamlet’s innermost desires:

What is it [...] that inhibits [Hamlet] in fulfilling the task set him by his father’s ghost? [...] Hamlet is able to do anything—except take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and who took that father’s place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his childhood realized.

(p. 367)

Towards the end of his interpretation, Freud observes a biographical point that ‘*Hamlet* was written immediately after the death of Shakespeare’s father (in 1601)’ (p. 368). The tragic hero thus has something fundamentally in common with his creator. But this point immediately resonates with one we mentioned in the chapter one: namely that *The Interpretation of Dreams* was written in response to the death of Freud’s own father, in

being thought to have closed his eyes *to*—to have ‘winked at’ or to have ‘overlooked’ his duty towards—a father who perhaps deserved a more elaborate send-off.

Garber perceives something else rather more dubious here. It should be mentioned immediately that she is content to regard fantasy and the Oedipus complex as mere substitutes for the reality of sexual abuse and seduction theory—a position which we attempted to refute in the Introduction.² It was, she points out, just less than a year after the death of Freud’s father Jacob (28 November 1896) that Freud abandoned the seduction theory. Moreover, she says, in the letter of September 1897 where Freud had informed Fliess of the reasons for his change of heart, he had mentioned to his friend the fact that ‘[with the *neurotica*] in all cases the father, not excluding my own, had to be accused of being perverse’ (Appendix to this thesis). As Garber explains, until Masson’s translation of the correspondence in 1985, the earlier published version of the letter had omitted the ‘not excluding my own’ of Freud’s original (Garber 1987 p. 167-8). Jacob Freud was tacitly edited out. For Garber, this hitherto omitted detail is an important ingredient to Freud’s unconscious anxieties regarding his father’s funeral: it suggests that the abandonment of a theory based on traumatic sex abuse, and its ‘substitution’ by a theory of infantile fantasy was, at least partially, Freud’s way of ‘winking at’ a certain perversity on the part of his own father. Thus she wonders whether, in accepting Freud’s notion of Oedipal fantasy, and, by extension, his ‘Oedipal’ reading of *Hamlet*, we in our turn are being requested to close an eye to the sins of the father (p. 168).

There are good reasons to quarrel with the specifics of Garber’s argument, for it depends upon a naïve understanding of the transformations which took place in Freud’s thought during 1897. Nonetheless, her fundamental point is an important one. Whether or

not we wish to reject the biographical grounds of Garber's charge concerning the sins of Jacob Freud himself, it remains true that from 21 September 1897 onwards Freud's eyes do close to the sins of the fathers, at least in the most general sense of continuing to leave unacknowledged the significance of parental desire in the constitution of the subject's psychic life. And as we saw in the Introduction, Freud's interpretation of *Hamlet* appears only after this shift is announced in the letter of the equinox.

I do not wish to rely on biographical information or supposition pertaining to Freud, Shakespeare and their fathers. But Garber's point enables us to propose a suggestive parallel between Hamlet and Freud, a mutual factor which implicates the tragic malaise of the former with the interpretative approach of the latter towards it. In 1900, Freud, a bereft son, directs his analytic attention to a dramatic tragedy concerning another famously bereft son. What interests him is why this tragic figure is unable to act upon his ghostly father's word, why Hamlet cannot carry out his father's desire. Yet Freud had first turned his interpretative attention to this drama in 1897, and not at a random moment, but when he himself had begun to exclude the question of adult/parental desire from his conception of psychic development. If Hamlet seems constantly to wink at the duty demanded of him by his father, then Freud approaches this problem from a theoretical position which has already begun to wink at the difficult question of the constitutive role of adult desire as transmitted to the subject. In short, if Hamlet is seen persistently to overlook the desire of his father, so Freud—and his interpretative postulation of an Oedipal solution—overlooks the question of the father's desire in relation to *Hamlet*.

In this chapter I want to move away from the classical psychoanalytic assumption that Hamlet's notorious hesitancy can be attributed to an undisclosed Oedipal content. My

² Indeed, her argument is flagrantly indebted to Masson (1984).

principal focus will concern not what it is already 'in' Hamlet that makes him wink at his paternally-assigned duty, but that which is exogenously placed within him by his ghostly father's message of assignment and which, paradoxically, brings about the paralysis that Freud—after, and only after, September 1897—is led to attribute to the internal necessity of Oedipal wishes. Freud's account of the dream of closing the/an eye(s), I will propose, can be put to work precisely in the service of understanding this paradox, and, indeed, the very logic which Shakespeare's text sets forth as the motor of its composition.

Let us begin afresh, then, with reference to the critical heritage of the play, by taking up the problematic character of Hamlet's relation to his father—a relation which is, I suggest, inseparable from the text's perceived 'modernity'.

Remember me

Ferdinand Tönnies' claim, cited as our first epigraph, offers an important, complicating, and ultimately very telling adjunct to the paradigm of modern subjectivity which 'bourgeois' critics, like Freud, have continued to identify in Hamlet's self-conscious display of elusive, subjective depth.³

In a recent book on renaissance tragedy Michael Neill (1997) argues that the virtue of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, itself a critique of the revenge genre, consists in its emphasis on remembrance.⁴ Neill remarks, aptly, that 'Hamlet has become so much the best-known example of revenge tragedy, whose premises it explores and questions, that it is difficult to

³ See in particular Barker (1984), whose demarcation of 'bourgeois' criticism we will remain with provisionally; also Belsey (1985) and Mousley (1994). On *Hamlet*, modernity and the Modernists, see Britzolakis (1994). On the role of the Reformation and the abolition of Purgatory in the parallel progress towards modern subjectivity and forgetting the dead, see esp. Low (1999).

⁴ On this point cf. John Kerrigan (1981), where the author also points out that the word 'memory' occurs more than twice as often in *Hamlet* than in any other play by Shakespeare. For other critiques which, like Neill's, notice the equation in *Hamlet* between revenge and remembrance, see also Kerrigan (1996) and Sacks (1985).

recognize how significantly it reshaped the genre to which it belonged' (p. 244). He then points out that one important surviving detail of the prior and so-called *Ur-Hamlet* comes from Thomas Lodge's description of its Ghost crying 'like an oyster-wife, "Hamlet, revenge!"' In a deliberate contrast with this famous shriek, he suggests, Shakespeare's Ghost replaces the traditional injunction in its call, 'Remember me!' (I. v. 91). By means of a subtle but dramatically anomalous, and Neill suggests, outrageous alteration, Hamlet is thus sworn not to revenge, but to remember.⁵ Behind this adjustment, argues Neill, lies the 'great discovery' of *Hamlet*: namely the recognition that 'revenge tragedy, at the deepest level, is less about the ethics of vendetta than it is about murderous legacies of the past and the terrible power of memory' (Neill 1997 p. 244). For the sixteenth-century's exhumation of the revenge genre has been productively linked by several authors, including Neill, to what Natalie Zemon Davies (1977) refers to as the doing away with the dead as an 'age group' in Protestant societies.⁶ The Reformation's abolition of Purgatory and the doctrinal injunction against mourning or praying for the dead meant that '[a]ll the forms of exchange and communication between souls in the other world and the living were to be swept away' (Davies 1977 p. 95).⁷ Deprived of the intercessory means of masses, prayers and indulgences to act on the behalf of its deceased, the Protestant conscience was left with an intolerable burden of remembrance. Revenge drama, Neill suggests, was just one of the 'fantasy response[s] to the sense of despairing impotence produced by the [...] displacement of the dead' (Neill 1997 p. 246).⁸ At the heart of the revenge project, it is

⁵ Cf Kerrigan (1981) *passim*.

⁶ The connection between Protestant doctrine and the genesis of revenge tragedy is also taken up by Brown (1979), and Low (1999). The theological complexities and ambiguities of the post-Reformation Ghost of *Hamlet* are discussed in detail in Dover Wilson (1935) and Prosser (1971).

⁷ These transformations became entrenched in English Law in the Chantries Act and Royal Injunctions of 1547, and registered in the Edwardian Prayerbook of 1549.

⁸ Cf. Low (1999) *passim*.

suggested, is the need to 'set right' a failed rite of passage, to 'intercede' on behalf of the dead ancestor. The revenger is one haunted by ghosts because he is possessed by memory. His role is thus essentially that of a 'remembrancer': 'he is both an agent of memory and one whose task it is to exact payments for the debts of the past' (p. 247). Doctrinal transformations in commemorative practice amounted to an imperative that the living forget the deceased. To revenge *is* to remember.

We shall return in detail to the general question of commemorative practice later on. In the meantime let us note that in the very act of dramatising and stressing this 'great discovery' *Hamlet* will not cease simultaneously to complicate and trouble it. For it is precisely in the deferral of revenge that the fabric and action of the play have been supposed to consist. According to a simple binary logic Hamlet's duty to revenge has traditionally been opposed in an either/or fashion to his notorious procrastination. It is in the *gap between* the injunction and the final murder of the King (not, then, in revenge, but in its opposite, hesitancy) that, as Francis Barker (1984) has pointed out, traditional criticism has intervened with all the character-based explanatory diagnoses (Romantic, post-Romantic, Oedipal) of modern subjectivity (p. 164). Yet even Barker's own ideologically astute reading of Hamlet concludes with the affirmation that the Hamlet of modernity (which he carefully and rightly argues to be no more than the site of an embarrassing 'absence') is mutually exclusive with the Hamlet who fulfils his filial duty. So much so that he argues:

in order that the play may end, a second Hamlet must be introduced [...]
 The Hamlet who delays (and whose delaying is but the linear deployment
 of the 'vertical' absence within) is replaced by one who simply waits [...]
 [T]he challenge of Hamlet's incipient modernity is extinguished [...] and

the prince recuperated to the order of the spectacle which his opacity has troubled.

(pp. 165-6)⁹

According to the binary logic supposed by Barker's thesis—revenge *versus* delay—Hamlet articulates himself as a modern subject only so long as he does not carry out the traditional paternal imperative of vengeance. But the specificity of the Ghost's anomalous injunction inflects such a supposition in advance. To delay is *not* to revenge (says the reader of *Hamlet*); but to revenge is to remember (the Ghost has already said): to hesitate is therefore not to remember, it is to forget.¹⁰ None of this refutes the foundation of Neill's claim, however. On the contrary, the thesis of his chapters on *Hamlet* helps us to recognise, retrospectively, that whether it has known it or not, criticism has always already been marked by the singularity of the Ghost's injunction. That is to say that, for instance, even Freud's meditation on Hamlet's inhibition in carrying out the desire of his dead father (and the Oedipal solution which he offers) is, according to the specificity of the Ghost's demand, already and of necessity a meditation on Hamlet's failure to remember his father and his father's desire. Our point is not, then, to disavow the great critical matter which has been made of the excessively strong attachment Hamlet shows to his father's memory. Rather, it is to suggest the traditional co-ordinates within which such an observation might be made—namely those set by the question: 'why does Hamlet (not revenge but) delay?', or, in Barker's case, 'just what (if anything) is revealed of Hamlet while he delays?'—will already be prescribed and defined by the singular ghostly injunction of Shakespeare's text as an acknowledgement (albeit inadvertent) of Hamlet's 'forgetting'. In short, insofar as

⁹ On this 'second Hamlet' cf. Belsey (1985) p. 49.

¹⁰ Although we will not deal with it at length, it is significant that in Barker's later book (1993) the author devotes several pages to the issues of ruptured commemoration of the dead and 'the impossibility of memory as such' in *Hamlet*: p. 41; cf. pp. 31ff.

Hamlet the subject of modern consciousness is traditionally presumed to be Hamlet the procrastinator, he seems condemned to have been remembered as the one who ‘forgets’ the dead.

Tonnies’ definition of the modern subject could, in this sense, be read like a gloss on critical disquisitions on Hamlet’s modernity. But the posture which it outlines is far from unique. Not least of all, Nietzsche’s ‘Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ (1874) as it has been taken up by Paul de Man in his own paper ‘Literary History and Literary Modernity’ (1969), erects a comparable conceptual account, pitting Life *against* History. For Nietzsche what appears to be the privilege of the placid state of the animal herd, in contrast to restless human society, revolves around the differential function of memory: ‘[...] the man says, “I remember” and envies the animal who at once forgets, and for whom every moment really dies, sinks back into night and fog and is extinguished forever’ (Nietzsche 1874 p. 61).¹¹ Yet the condition of animality remains a constitutive part of man, specifically in fact ‘as the foundation upon which alone anything sound, healthy, great, anything truly human, can grow’ (p. 63):

As he who acts is, in Goethe’s words, always without a conscience, so is he also always without knowledge; he forgets most things so that he can do one thing; he is unjust towards what lies behind him, and he recognises the rights only of that which is now to come [...].

(p. 64)

For de Man, Nietzsche’s ruthless forgetting in the name of action, of doing—the blindness with which he throws himself into an action lighted of all previous experience, ‘captures the authentic spirit of modernity’ (de Man 1969 p. 147). The modern soul is erected by and upon the *annihilation* of all anteriority. A veritable tradition of the anti-traditional, then,

¹¹ Since later in the chapter we will have occasion to quote Nietzsche’s paper independently I refer to R.J. Hollingdale’s translation rather than de Man’s own as it appears in his paper.

modernity is secured in the disavowal and dismissal of ancestry. Little wonder that Hamlet the ‘modern soul’ is also Hamlet the delayer, and thus implicitly the forgetter. Little wonder too that one of those modern ‘recensions’, as Barker calls them, identified in Hamlet has been the tragic desire of Oedipus the parricide. ‘The tragedy of Oedipus’, Jean Joseph Goux tells us in the closing pages of the text we discussed in Chapter One, ‘indicates [...] the folds of the symbolic that shape every passage from heteronomy to autonomy’ (Goux 1993 p. 202).

Foreclosure: Marjorie Garber’s Lacanian reading

Now, one of the most interesting attempts to co-ordinate the challenges of Hamlet’s delay, the singularity of his father’s injunction, and the issue of modernity, is made by Marjorie Garber in her aforementioned *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers*. In the service of her argument Garber invokes both Nietzsche and de Man; but it is the work of Jacques Lacan which orients her thought most strongly. I do not wish to engage with her book in its entirety; I intend only to outline briefly the problematic drift of her reasoning with regard to *Hamlet*. For this tragedy is represented by Garber as ‘a play that articulates [...] the construction of the modern subject’ (1987 p. 157), but in such a way, I suggest, as to exert a pressure on the Lacanian framework which the latter cannot contain.

Garber takes as her starting point Lacan’s *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), together with his own Seminar on Shakespeare’s text, ‘Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*’ (1982). She takes up the suggested equivalence marked by Lacan between the Ghost of Hamlet *père* and the ‘veiled phallus’:

[T]he very source of what makes Hamlet’s arm waver at every moment, is the narcissistic connection that Freud tells us about in his text on the

decline of the Oedipus complex: one cannot strike the phallus, because the phallus, even the real phallus, is a ghost
(Lacan 1982; cited in Garber 1987 p. 130)

From this Garber argues that *Hamlet* represents a turning around of the anxiety about the general *cultural* failure of the 'paternal metaphor' legible elsewhere in the Shakespearean corpus: namely the anxiety concerning paternity, legitimacy, inheritance, primogeniture and succession (Garber 1987 p. 133). For Lacan the Name-of-the-Father is the dead father.¹² But the presence of the Ghost signals the failure of the Prince's initiation into the Symbolic order. '[F]ar from providing Hamlet with the prohibitions of the Law that would allow his desire to survive', Lacan tells us, '[his] too ideal father is constantly being doubted' (Lacan 1964; cited in Garber 1987 p. 131). In other words, says Garber, the Ghost, by virtue of being a ghost, is 'incompletely a representative of the Law':

He puts in question his own being as well as his message [the tale of fratricide]. Is he a spirit of health or goblin damn'd? Is this the real Law? Is this the truth? As long as the Law of the father is doubted or put in question it cannot be (or is not) internalized, not assimilated into the symbolic, and therefore blocks rather than facilitates Hamlet's passage into the symbolic where he will find his desire.

(p. 131)

Hamlet's father is thus in a certain sense 'not dead enough'.

Now at this point in her description of the prince's haunted filial relation Garber invokes a crucial conceptual distinction which is not unproblematic. Following Lacan, she distinguishes between the pathological defence mechanisms of repression and foreclosure (*forclusion*). Through the notion of foreclosure Lacan has attempted to stabilise conceptually the term *Verwerfung* (repudiation) as it appears at significant moments in

¹² Cf. '[T]he symbolic Father is, insofar as he signifies [the] Law, the dead Father', Lacan (1955-6a) p. 199.

Freud's thinking on psychosis.¹³ Unlike other psychical mechanisms of defence *Verwerfung*, as Lacan takes it up, is a definitively psychotic procedure that entails the *primordial expulsion* of a fundamental signifier. It is thus, as Laplanche and Pontalis explain, distinct from repression in two ways. Firstly because foreclosed signifiers are never integrated in the subject's unconscious; and secondly because, therefore, they do not return 'from the inside', but rather, re-emerge in 'the real', for instance in the form of hallucinations (Laplanche and Pontalis 1967 p. 166).¹⁴ Garber sums up the distinction in the following manner: 'Repression submerges or covers over unconscious thoughts that foreclosure *does not permit*' (Garber 1987 p. 132 emphasis added). In the Lacanian aetiology of psychosis the Name-of-the-Father has not been inscribed and then repressed: the psychotic subject has simply not admitted the paternal signifier into his symbolic world at all. In this connection, Garber cites another of Lacan's works, 'The Freudian Thing':

It is in the lack of the Name-of-the-Father in that place which, by the hole that it opens up in the signified, sets off the cascade of reshapings of the signifier from which the increasing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, to the point at which the level is reached at which signifier and signified are stabilized in the delusional metaphor.

(Lacan 1955; cited in Garber 1987 p. 132)

Neither Garber nor Lacan goes so far as to reduce the presence of the Ghost to a hallucination. Nevertheless, it is crucial to stress that, within Garber's Lacanian framework at least, Hamlet *père*'s not being dead-enough—the repetitious appearance of the Ghost to his son—cannot be thought to signal in any simple way an excessive domination of Hamlet *fils* by his father. Quite the contrary, the presence of the Ghost as the figure of incomplete

¹³ See Lacan (1955-6a) *passim*, and his *Seminar* on the psychoses (1955-6b). On the Freudian lineage of this term and the itinerary of its resumption by Lacan see the entry for 'Foreclosure (Repudiation)' in Laplanche and Pontalis's dictionary (1967). In Freud it is most closely expounded, of course, in the Schreber case (1911 [1910]).

¹⁴ See Lacan (1955-6b), p. 13: 'Whatever has been refused in the Symbolic order, in the sense of *Verwerfung*, reappears in the real'.

Law whose status Hamlet can only doubt (and therefore hesitate before) is a *symptom* of precisely the *lack* of the Name-of-the-Father. Hamlet might insist his father so loved his mother ‘That he might not beteem the winds of heaven/To visit her face too roughly’ (I. ii. 141-2), might re-envision him bearing

Hyperion’s curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars to threaten and command,
A station like the herald of Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill

(III. iv. 56-59)

—while acknowledging from the first that he was but ‘a man’ (I. ii. 187). In short, Hamlet might well idealise his father. He might also, as Garber reminds us, be *the* son for whom psychoanalytic readers have not failed to identify myriad substitute father-figures, in Claudius, Polonius, even old Fortinbras and Norway (Garber 1987 p. 133). ‘[H]e is’ in these points, Garber says, ‘too much in the son, but where is paternity, where is the law?’ (pp. 133-4). The excess of paternity that so strongly seems to colour and overdetermine both Hamlet’s elaborate descriptions of his father and his connections with Claudius and the rest, in fact only testify to the prior *repudiation* of paternal law:

Indeed [Garber says], as in the case of the Medusa, where a multiplicity of penises is imagined to cover the unimaginable horror of no penis, of castration, so here the multiplicity of fathers covers over the fact of the lack. Covers it, in Hamlet, by foreclosing rather than repressing it.

(p. 134)

So far Garber’s thinking appears to conform to the pattern that we have attempted to outline above: namely that of identifying the figure of modernity as a self-fashioning, self-authoring subject whose very selfhood—such as it is—is constituted by and in the absence of ancestry, paternity, or in Nietzsche’s sense, History. Her invocation of the psychotic mechanism of foreclosure is particularly telling, however, and for two reasons. Firstly

because by virtue of its function as a constitutive and, as it were, normative aberrance the absolute rejection and thus lack of the paternal signifier described by Garber gives her thesis a strong affinity with that of Jean Joseph Goux's notion of the Oedipean (1993). Hamlet is not 'clinically' *diagnosed* as schizophrenic or psychotic as if he were a patient on the analytic couch. Rather, the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father is seen to be the general condition of modernity, normative in its very perversion. The absence of the paternal signifier 'in' Hamlet—his failure to have been initiated by the paternal sanction of the symbolic—thus captures the trajectory of the modern subject precisely in its aberrance. As Jean Joseph Goux puts it, the modern subject can be 'characterised' by a 'permanent break with tradition, a type of knowledge that is structured by the Oedipean avoidance that has become an active mode of historicity' (Goux 1993 p. 202). Garber's ostensibly pathological description of Hamlet's modernity would appear to lend support to Goux's claim that 'the *madness* of Oedipus has become Western reason' (p. 202).

The second thing to note, however, is that when Garber considers the Ghost's injunction, 'Remember me!', her analysis, in spite of itself, problematises—or rather shows *Hamlet* to problematise—the concept of foreclosure as such.¹⁵ Having heard the Ghost's commandment, Hamlet announces and affirms his commitment, pledges his 'word' by an act of inscription. He 'sets down' the 'commandment' in his 'tables' (I. v. 95-112). Situating this moment of inscription within a de Manian paradigm of *Gedächtnis* ('memory') versus *Erinnerung* ('recollection'),¹⁶ Garber argues that the language of internalisation or interiorisation in *Hamlet* concerns *metabolisation*: digestion and eating. Hamlet's 'table' of memory must take the place of the 'table' which was coldly furnished at

¹⁵ It also problematises the implicit ipsocentrism of Goux's thesis.

his mother's wedding by the 'bak'd meats' of his father's funeral (I. ii. 180-1; cited in Garber 1987 p. 150).¹⁷ But such a procedure is imperfect. In a phrase redolent of Lacan's formulation that 'whatever has been refused in the Symbolic order [...] reappears in the real', she suggests, Hamlet will himself ultimately be positioned 'between cannibalism and anorexia, spewing forth in language what he cannot swallow, taunting Claudius with a reminder of "how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (IV. iii. 30-1)' (p. 150). For now, Garber says, Hamlet is caught in a trap by what she calls the 'double pull of the paternal imperative, an imperative so indigestible that it must be written down' (p. 150). Why is the pull of the command indigestibly double? Because in contrast with Michael Neill for whom 'Remember!' assumes a critical synonymity with 'Revenge!', Garber's reading, propelled by her Nietzschean paradigm, claims that the two are radically opposed—the annihilation of memory is a prerequisite for the possibility of action:

[T]he more Hamlet remembers, the more he meditates the 'word' that he takes as the Ghost's 'commandment' and inscribes on his tables, the more he is trapped in a round of speculation. Far from goading him into action, the Ghost's twice iterated instruction, 'Remember me', 'do not forget', impedes that action, impedes revenge. What Hamlet needs to do is not to remember, but to *forget*.

(p. 154)

The 'externalised' act of writing thus becomes a figure for the failure to internalise the Name-of-the-Father—the latter being internally contradictory and thus 'indigestible'. Yet to bring her argument back within an explicitly psychoanalytic domain, Garber attempts to link the notion of remembering to Freud's elaboration of the dynamics of transference and the repetition compulsion. She invokes the extraordinary moment immediately after the

¹⁶ The terms come from de Man (1982). While Garber's invocation of this text is extremely suggestive we need not concern ourselves directly with its implications.

¹⁷ We shall have cause to return to Garber's insightful suggestion, and specifically to *metabolisation*, later in the chapter.

encounter with his father's ghost when Hamlet appears in Ophelia's closet, looking 'As if he had been loosed out of hell/To speak of horrors' (II. I. 83-4), and his peculiar statement to Horatio in the final act, 'I am dead' (V. ii. 338). In order to address what would seem to be the Prince's inadvertent repetition of his (ghostly) father's appearance, Garber cites the following passage from Freud's 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through' (1914):

We may say that the patient *remembers* nothing of what is forgotten and repressed, but that he expresses it in an *action*. He reproduces it not in his memory but in his behaviour; he repeats it, without of course knowing that he is repeating it.

(Freud 1914; cited in Garber 1987 p. 159)

Significantly, she goes on to cite in succession three moments from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) in which Freud describes the power of repetition as 'daemonic', and states the following: 'In terms of *Hamlet*, this "daemonic" force or power, if it is to be ascribed to or even personified by the Ghost, is the compulsion which repression substitutes for remembering' (Garber 1987 p. 162). In other words, confronted with the command 'Remember me!' 'Hamlet remembers that he is commanded to remember, but displaces that which he is unable to remember into compulsive behaviour of a kind that translates *him* into a daemon, into a ghost' (p. 162).

Garber's argument has thus undergone a shift of registers of which the Lacanian framework is intolerant. Originally the presence of the father's ghost (the Father-as-Ghost) signifies the failure of the paternal metaphor, its foreclosure: a process which Garber, following Lacan, dissociates from repression as one which *refuses to permit* unconscious thoughts per se. Yet Hamlet's failure to carry out the enjoined task, far from signalling the failed registration of the injunction, is ultimately shown to be an *effect* of its repression. If Garber's analysis is initially motivated by a familiar paradigm which co-ordinates the

modern hero with the absence of paternal sanction, nevertheless and in spite of itself, it progresses by insisting that Hamlet's tragic hesitancy is incited by the problematic *content* of the message which comes primarily from the other that is the father's ghost. His injunction, she claims, is 'indigestible'; yet—and to remain within Garber's terms—how can Hamlet 'spew' what he has never 'swallowed'? More precisely, how can he forget, repress, or (therefore) repeat that which he has already foreclosed, since each of these procedures involves the principle of repression which the latter mechanism precludes?

Excessive inscription

In a brief but suggestive paper entitled 'Implantation, Intromission' Laplanche offers a critique of, among others, the concept of *Verwerfung* that elucidates Garber's problematically sequential move *from* foreclosure *to* repression and opens up the possibility of a fundamentally different reading of the modern hero Hamlet. Foreclosure, he argues, participates in the idealist, ipsocentric tendency of psychoanalysis in which everything comes from the interior, 'emerg[ing] like rabbits or doves from the magic box of tricks' (Laplanche 1999 [1992a] p. 133). To foreclose, Laplanche says in the same paper, shares with other verbs used by psychoanalytic theory to describe psychical processes (to project, to introject, to identify, to disavow...) the feature of 'having as subject the individual in question: *I* project, *I* disavow, *I* foreclose, etc.' (p. 135). In other words, the concept of foreclosure, insofar as it is a process in which the individual takes an *active* part, presupposes, even as it scotomises, the prior constitution of the subject (the 'I') who does the foreclosing. The absolute rejection or expulsion of paternal Law can thus only ever be secondary to the anterior moment of its provisional registration. Put simply, the subject

cannot project, hallucinate (Lacan) or spew (Garber) what has not already been somehow internalised. If Garber's analysis of Hamlet 'the modern subject' moves towards a description of the internalisation (in the form of repression) of the ancestral ghost which she has described as having already been foreclosed, it is because although her text labours, along Lacanian lines, to dissociate the two, internalisation is as it were already and of necessity *internal* to the possibility of foreclosure.¹⁸

In the project to break from the illusionist's trap of ipsocentrism Laplanche, as we know, proposes the concept of *implantation* to describe the normal process of the originary intervention of the other (who will be the subject of the verb) that incites and allows for primary repression and translation. Alongside his critique of the mechanism of foreclosure, however, he also sets forth as a 'violent variant' of implantation, the notion of *intromission*—the insertion by the other of a message whose traumatising content resists binding and blocks translation-repression. This intromission, this excess of message, is, as Laplanche conceives it, the centripetal movement to which the desperate expulsionary gesture of foreclosure can only be a defensive, secondary response. If the enigmatic signifier is enigmatic by virtue of its carrying a repressed content, the signifier of intromission is *not repressed enough* to facilitate active translation. The intromitted message emanating from the other is indeed, to appropriate Garber's term, indigestible by the subject in whom it must nevertheless primarily become lodged:

While implantation allows the individual to take things up actively, at once translating and repressing [...intromission...] short-circuits the differentiation of the agencies in the process of their formation, and puts into the interior an element resistant to all metabolism.

(Laplanche 1999A [1992a p. 136])

¹⁸ The symptomatic tension of Garber's reading is most clearly legible in her mixed metaphor of digestion: the anorexic refuses food; it is the bulimic that spews, having first ingested.

Garber's text is unable, or unwilling, to sustain the conceptual distinctions between foreclosure, forgetting and repression. They figure as if they amount to the same thing: namely the absence from the (modern) subject of the (Name-of-the) father, while any such rejection in fact must presuppose the prior inscription of the Law, albeit in some provisional or perverse manner. The subject must know in advance just what it is he forgets, represses, or attempts to banish from his psychical life altogether. Whatever Hamlet will do with his ghostly father's singular injunction (and this will be our subject in what follows) will be secondary to its inscription, not just on the 'external' tables at hand, but in the 'book and volume of his brain':

Remember thee?
 Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
 In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
 Yea, from the table of my memory
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
 All saw of books, all forms, all pressures past
 That youth and observation copied there,
 And thy commandment alone shall live
 Within the book and volume of my brain,
 Unmix'd with baser matter [...]
 My tables. Meet it is I set it down
 That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain—
 At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.

Writes

So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word.
 It is 'Adieu, adieu, remember me'.
 I have sworn't.

(I. v. 95-112)

The moment of inscription is carefully divided into an interiorised and an exteriorised act, figuratively yoked together by the notion of *writing*. Now what Hamlet physically 'Writes' upon his tables, let us note, is in any case not the Ghost's commandment, but rather his own axiomatic surmise which his father's revelation about Claudius has authorised—that one may smile and smile and be a villain. An external act of writing, then, an *aide de memoire*:

the function of which is vilified elsewhere in Shakespeare. The speaker of Sonnet 122—a poem which elaborates as a conceit the figuration of memory and writing in the above passage—disposes of the ‘tables’ the Lady has given him as a gift, since to write, to require a written *aide*, signifies a weakness of pure memory: ‘To keep an adjunct to remember thee’, he assures her in his final couplet, ‘Were to import forgetfulness in me’ (Sonnet 122, 13-4). In *Hamlet* the metaphorisation of the first, mnemonic, inscription (I. v. 95-104), the trope of ‘interior’ writing which bears solely and explicitly on the father’s injunction, rather than being a rhetorical device by which Hamlet distances, exempts himself from or bastardises the committal of the commandment to his memory—(the ‘imperative [is] so indigestible that it must [albeit metaphorically] be written down’)—in fact fleetingly shows itself to be intolerant of any simple opposition between internal and external writing altogether, but ultimately will signify the excessive receptivity of the former.¹⁹ Both at this moment in *Hamlet* and in Sonnet 122 Shakespeare’s writing sets forth memory *as* (already) a tabular writing-surface; but not, we must add, in a deconstructive move designed to convey the primary supplementarity of the ‘original’. For finally the interiorised trope of writing will recuperate and reinforce the privileged superiority of memory over its aid. In the Sonnet the speaker strategically tropes and interiorises the tabular image of the writing surfaces. Rather than keep the gift, he will, he says, ‘character’ them in the ‘tables’ of his own mind:

This gift, thy tables, are within my brain
Full characterized with lasting memory,
Which shall above that idle rank remain
Beyond all date, even to eternity;
Or at the least so long as brain and heart
Have faculty by nature to subsist,

¹⁹ On the metaphysical opposition between the ‘self-presence’ of memory and the supplement of graphic inscription see Derrida, (1966a).

Till each to razed oblivion yield his part
 Of thee, thy record never can be missed.
 That poor retention could not so much hold,
 Nor need I tallies thy dear love to score;
 Therefore to give them from me was I bold,
 To trust those tables that receive thee more.

(1-12)

The singularity of this Sonnet ought to be noted: elsewhere in the sequence Shakespeare will have more frequent recourse to the traditional Renaissance privilege of the posthumous permanence accorded to the poet's written word over human memory.²⁰ But here, as in Hamlet's pledge, the speaker describes two writing surfaces, the one exterior, the other interior; and if the separation between them is ostensibly submerged by the shared image of 'tables' (lines 1 and 12), it is, after all, only the better to bastardise the latter as a poor retention. The poem discards writing and valorises memory even as the speaker has disposed of the written tables and committed their content to his brain. For memory, pure memory, implies the absence of the memorised thing itself. Thus while it seems as if the opposition between memory and writing is momentarily collapsed (in a recognition that *memory is only a writing*) the poem in fact stages what might be described as a scene of tropic usurpation. The place and function of exterior writing is at once appropriated metaphorically to the processes of memory (just as the written content of the tables is mnemonically interiorised) *and/in order that* it can (like the tables themselves) be purged away. What is significant for us is that in this contextually singular poem the connection established between writing and memory is a strategic manoeuvre by which the speaker, at least, will insist on the superior capacity of his mind to 'receive' the other. Far from reducing memory to the mere and ephemeral secondarity of its 'supplement', it underwrites

a reception of the other that is initially signalled as excess (an imprint that will last ‘Beyond all date’ until ‘eternity’) which the speaker finds himself having to master and rationalise (‘Or at the least so long as brain and heart/Have faculty [...] to subsist’). So too in Hamlet’s speech, where the son analogously qualifies his urgent promise to ‘Remember’: ‘whiles memory holds a seat/In this distracted globe’. What Hamlet commits to the poor retention of his tables, or notebook, are his own words; and this action occurs after and in opposition to the act of purely mnemonic inscription to which it is indeed tropically linked. As in the Sonnet the exteriorised written tables exist for the sake of their own bastardisation; memory and writing are metaphorically yoked the better to affirm their differential receptiveness. For Hamlet has just promised to erase and keep out of his memory ‘all trivial fond records’, *therefore* he writes his own thoughts down on the next best thing.²¹ If it is ‘meet’ Hamlet ‘set down’ that one can smile and smile and be a villain, this is because he has promised to preserve the memory of the Ghost ‘unmix’d’ with ‘baser matter’. The presence of the writing tables during Hamlet’s pledge—the metaphorical presence of writing per se—hardly signals an unwillingness or inability to receive (i.e. a foreclosure of) the father’s word. On the contrary, it enforces Hamlet’s oath to allow the commandment to live alone in the privileged volume of his mind.

Let us say, then, that the possibility of Hamlet’s existence as a figure of modern subjectivity on the grounds of his being one who rejects or expels the ancestral call can only be secondary. Fundamental to the scene of Hamlet’s oath-taking is a strategic

²⁰ See Sonnets 16-19, 54, 55, 60, 63, 65, 81, 100, 101, 107. This, more usual, privilege is ultimately grounded in the same metaphysical opposition, since it assumes the necessary possibility of repetition and citation (i.e. therefore permanence in the absence of an animating intention) to pertain only to exteriorised writing.

²¹ It should be remarked that the privilege accorded here to human memory as against the written supplement breaks down even as it is affirmed, since Hamlet’s promise to expunge all else to make space for his father’s command means that the new inscription of the latter must equally contain the necessary possibility of erasure

metaphorisation of memory which not only insists upon the primary inscription of the father's message but attempts to restrict that 'writing' to a valorised mnemonic domain. In addressing the radical question of the primary inscription of the paternal injunction might we not posit that what is at stake is, in fact, not too little but too much? Does not Hamlet's response to the Ghost's command, the promise to erase all else from the book and volume of his brain *but* the command so that it may live alone and unmixed, sound closer to the intromission of an excess of message rather than its supposed foreclosure? This will be the subject of the following section.

Repetition/transmission: the poisonous message

Hearing, when it occurs, breaks the continuity of an undifferentiated perceptual field and at the same time is a sign (the noise waited for and heard in the night) which puts the subject in the position of having to answer to something.

Laplanche and Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality'

We noted above that it is when Garber attempts to account for what she calls Hamlet's 'daemonic' repetitions of the Ghost (repetitions which, she concedes, require some form of unconscious inscription) that the initial encounter between son and father necessarily shows itself intolerant of the Lacanian paradigm of foreclosure. Over the next few pages I want to take up and elaborate the notion that the Ghost's message to Hamlet already constitutes a repetition, and what is more, a performative repetition of the very scene of murder which it describes. Neither the first nor the only repetition but the decisive one in a dominant network throughout *Hamlet* which will depend upon the same imagistic centres of gravity, the introduction of poison through the ear—which is central to the

or being forgotten. None of which alters our fundamental point about the significance of this speech: that any erasure or forgetting of the father must of necessity presuppose its prior or provisional inscription.

content of the spectral injunction to revenge—becomes, I will suggest, a figure for the traumatising and paralysing introduction (intromission) of the other's message (as message) into the ear of the addressee.

Now the opening of the first Act hardly constitutes a 'beginning' at all. The Ghost's dreaded appearance will already be a return ('What, has this thing appear'd *again* tonight?' (I. i. 24 emphasis added)) but, moreover, one whose motive will continue to be withheld until the final Scene. The exchanges among the Soldiers, and subsequently between them and Horatio, thus become situated both in an inadvertent relation of *après coup* to the murder of the old King and in anticipation of the spectral revelation of its details whose character already marks the protagonists' discourse:

Barnardo: Who's there?
Francisco: Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.
Barnardo: Long live the King!
Francisco: Barnardo?
Barnardo: He.
Francisco: You come most carefully upon your hour.
Barnardo: 'Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco.
Francisco: For this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold,
 And I am sick at heart.

(I. i. 1-7)

We will never receive a definitive diagnosis of Francisco's sickness of heart beyond its synecdochic connection with the general rottenness at the core of the state which Marcellus will identify the following night (I. v. 90). His cryptic malady thus serves to locate the present moment in which he speaks as the aftermath of an event whose happening is not yet recognised but whose symptoms have already taken hold. Furthermore, the words of the two men on the guard platform are haunted by the auricular character of the still-occluded murder. Consumed as they are by darkness it is the ears of the two men that are poised to sense any local disturbance in an otherwise bafflingly undifferentiated perceptual field.

Self-identification is registered in an auditory fashion. Barnardo must ‘unfold’ himself with a perfunctory (and ironic) declamation (‘Long live the King!’) that formally affirms his co-allegiance with Francisco and facilitates the latter’s recognition of the signature of his voice (‘Barnardo?’).

To be sure, to those on stage the Ghost will be the only definitively visible figure—both recognisably ‘like the King that’s dead’ (I. i. 44) and furnishing the scholar Horatio with the necessary ‘sensible and true avouch/Of [his] own eyes’ (60-1). More striking, though, is how the Soldiers identify Horatio’s prior scepticism as an auditory resistance:

Marcellus: Horatio says ‘tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him,
Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us.
Therefore I have entreated him along
With us to watch the minutes of the night,
That if again this apparition come,
He may approve our eyes and speak to it.

Horatio: Tush, tush, ‘twill not appear.

Barnardo: Sit down awhile,
*And let us once again assail your ears,
That are so fortified against our story,
What we have two nights seen.*

Horatio: Well, sit we down
And *let us hear* Barnardo speak of this.

Barnardo: Last night of all,
When yond same star that’s westward from the pole,
Had made his course t’illuminate that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one—

Enter GHOST.

Marcellus: Peace, break thee off. Look where it come again.
(I. i. 26-43, emphasis added)

In spite and because of the ocular proof of itself that the Ghost gives to Horatio and the rest, its (re)appearance consolidates a vertiginous series of repetitions anchored to the auricular crime committed before the opening of the play. What is significant in the exchanges

before the arrival of the spectre is not so much the fact of the Ghost's appearance to its first witnesses as the figurative transmission of a specific violence which it generates between the witnesses and Horatio. Absent from the earlier encounters, Horatio has only *heard* their stories; yet Barnardo describes them as nothing less than acts of auricular violence, repeated 'assailments' of Horatio's ear. The present assault, however, must be broken off. For, uncannily like Barnardo at midnight, the Ghost whose second appearance he now relates 'once again', comes, for the third time, most carefully upon its hour. At the moment the Ghost should enter Barnardo's story of the previous night (already a repetition of the night before), his story is interrupted, precisely by the entrance of the Ghost. With the same star burning 'now' in the same part of heaven and the same bell beating, the Soldier's retrospective narrative thus merges into its own re-enactment. To the dismay of his comrades, for a moment the startled Horatio, who has in part been invited along in order to get the thing to 'unfold' itself in speech, does nothing:

Horatio: [...] It harrows me with fear and wonder.
Barnardo: It would be spoke to.
Marcellus: Question it, Horatio.
(I. i. 48)²²

Amidst the Ghost's enigmatic silence, the synchronicity which is established between the narration of the previous nights' phenomenon and its re-enactment before the scholar signals a displacement even as it signals a repetition. The moment Horatio ceases to be purely an auditor and becomes thus newly situated as another witness upon whom 'sensible' belief has at last taken hold, the position which he has vacated is taken by another:

²² Note that Horatio's hesitation echoes that of the soldiers on the previous nights, who (I. ii. 204-6)
 distill'd
 Almost to jelly with the act of fear,

Horatio: Break we our watch up, and by my advice
 Let us impart what we have seen tonight
 Unto young Hamlet; for upon my life
 This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.
 Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it
 As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?
 (I. i. 173-6)

Not only is it that the 'need' and 'duty' of imparting the Ghost's presence slips along the chain to the erstwhile auditor; as Horatio makes clear in the following Scene, it is again an auricular organ, this time young Hamlet's, that must receive the message:

Horatio: Season your admiration for a while
 With an attent ear till I may deliver
 Upon the witness of these gentlemen
 This marvel to you.
Hamlet: For God's love let me hear!
 (I. ii. 192-195)²³

The oral dissemination and aural reception of the phenomenon of the Ghost thus entail a figurative and displaced repetition of the crime for whose expiation we have yet to learn it walks the night. Hamlet will attempt to block or 'cut off' the ostensible cycle of which he has inevitably become a part, immediately urging his informants that they 'Let it be tenable in [their] silence still' (248). Yet, as we will see, the audience which Hamlet eventually gives his ghostly father in Scene V, and the latter's insistence that all the witnesses 'Swear' themselves to silence (I. v. 149-89), recast this initial imperative to secrecy as already being the effect of a paradox; for the chain of repetitions which is inaugurated by the coming of the Ghost is itself, I want to suggest, precisely a cycle of blockage, of cutting off.

Stand dumb and speak not to him.

²³ It should be remarked that twenty lines earlier, and in response to his friend's self-accusation of truancy, Hamlet has already identified his own ear as a locus of verbal assault (I. ii. 170-3):

I would not hear your enemy say so,
 Nor shall you do my ear that violence
 To make it truster of your own report

It would not be unreasonable to liken what we have suggested so far concerning the permeation of certain moments of the first Act by the details of the crime whose exposition remains deferred until Scene v, to the suspenseful progress of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. As we saw in chapter one, the discourse of Sophocles' protagonist is saturated by images of parrincest and paternal violence (the binding of the son's feet), the traumatic significance of which is only made legible to Oedipus retroactively in the belated moment of *anagorisis*. In *Hamlet*, similarly, it is what Freud describes as the ability to 'understand and react [...] *in retrospect* [*nachträglich*]' (Freud 1916-7 [1915-7], pp. 416-7) which is conferred by the Ghost's revelations in Scene v upon Hamlet and the play's audience with regard to the strangely auricular detail that is threaded into the protagonists' verbal exchanges about the spectre. The Ghost's belated revelation of the crime thus functions aetiologically, disclosing as it were the text's *prôtarchos até*, its 'primal crime'²⁴ in which seems to be inaugurated the entire concatenation of verbal and literal poisonings that constitute the motivation and fabric of the revenge story.

Before discussing the Ghost's disclosure in detail, let us make a few provisional remarks concerning the singular character of the murder in the overall scheme of *Hamlet* as a revenge tragedy. The *prôtarchos até* remains 'absent' from *Hamlet*. It is never witnessed as such within the limits of the tragedy itself; it is only ever reconstructed in an overdetermined way by the posthumous recollection of one of its protagonists. Yet this traumatic core remains radically *uncontained* by Shakespeare's text. As Claudius reminds us, contending with his conscience, the murder of his brother 'hath the primal eldest curse upon't' (III. iii. 37). What lends his crime its horror, its very need for vengeance, is its

Against yourself.

²⁴ Cf. Miola (1992) pp. 33ff.

Biblical precedent, its position in relation to an anterior legacy of guilt.²⁵ The act of fratricide is at once primal and always already secondary, a repetition of ‘the first murder’. While this may sound familiar from the anterior legacies of violence and revenge which generically haunt revenge plots, it is in fact crucially different. Numerous studies have attempted to root the genealogy of the *Hamlet* story to the Oresteian cycle in which the bereft son is required to murder his ‘incestuous’ uncle in recompense for his father’s death.²⁶ Yet the transgression of Hamlet’s uncle marks a singular departure from the classical paradigm. Guy Rosolato (1969) presents that paradigm as a series of fatal but ‘symmetrical’ responses, a progressive ‘genealogy’ of murders, each a repayment for the one which precedes it (pp. 186-7). Thus the murder of Agamemnon which it befalls Orestes to avenge is an act of vengeance in itself, the exaction of a payment for a prior crime—namely, the Thyestean banquet. The latter, in its turn, is an act of vengeance spurred by Pelops’ fury towards his homophagic father Tantalus... This anterior history of cyclical debt and repayment is, however, precisely what is absent from the ‘primal’ crime of Shakespeare’s text. We will not say that the fratricide constitutes a pure repetition of the Biblical murder, a repetition ‘without difference’. But it is figured *as* a repetition, nevertheless, in such a way as to obviate the progressive or ‘tit for tat’ development between crime and crime which characterises the classic revenge model. Claudius’s crime resolutely does not operate in any reciprocal relation to the distant act of Biblical violence by which it is defined.²⁷ Claudius does not repay the earlier murder of one brother by the murder of another (avenging Abel on Cain): he *replays* it. The inaugural transgression at

²⁵ Cf. I. ii. 105; V. i. 75-6.

²⁶ See esp. Kott (1974) pp. 240-67, and Kerrigan (1981) and (1996) chapter seven.

²⁷ Indeed, the killing of Abel which it repeats, in itself repays nothing: it is the ‘first’ homicide, the originary creation of murderous debt.

the core of the revenge action in *Hamlet* does not amount to the incurring of a debt in the process of repaying an ancestral wrong, as does that of, say, Aeschylus' Aegisthus. It is simply a *renewal* of the ancestral debt, a static and unmodified repetition of the primary (Biblical) aggressor's violence.

Thus the 'daemonically' repetitious pattern which Garber identifies in Hamlet's relation to the Ghost—a pattern of acting *out* rather than acting *on*—is already legible in the very secondarity of the text's 'primal' scene. The Ghost, the revenant, which comes again and again most carefully upon its hour, and about which there is no doubt that it will come again (I. iii. 243), is itself the effect of a repetition. If in her bedchamber Hamlet reconstructs before Ophelia the appearance of his ghostly father, the scene which the Ghost has just reconstructed for him is, after all, nothing more than a reconstruction itself.

We might say the notion of a 'static' compulsion to repeat does not, then, pertain solely to Hamlet, or at least it does not pertain to Hamlet as the consequence of a refusal of his father's command. Repetition is something that marks and is marked by a passing on, an inheritance. From Claudius to the Ghost to Hamlet repetition is *transmitted*; but, what is more, in such a way as to compel its recipient to repeat the very scene of transmission in which he has been caught. Here is the Ghost's description to Hamlet of the 'primal' murder for whose expiation he walks the night:

But soft, methinks I scent the morning air
Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of mine ear did pour
The leprous distilment, whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body,

And with a sudden vigour it doth posset
 And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
 The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine,
 And a most instant tetter bark'd about,
 Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust
 All my smooth body.
 Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
 Of life, Of crown, of queen at once dispatched,
 Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
 Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd,
 No reck'ning made, but sent to my account
 With all my imperfections on my head.
 O horrible! O horrible! Most horrible!

(I. v. 58-80)

The most significant characteristic of the Ghost's lengthy speech—not only here but, as we will see, throughout—is the performative relation in which it stands to the crime that it is intended to disclose. Old Hamlet, his ghost tells us, was killed in the act of repeating himself: sleeping in the orchard as was his 'custom always'. His 'secure hour' has since become that signalled by the beating of the bell at night. The Ghost is no simple revenant which returns again and again. It walks, repetitiously, in order to tell of having being cut off even in the midst of its repetitions. Moreover, the disclosure is itself framed circumstantially by a cutting off. The Ghost prefaces his account with a warning of the threatening approach of morning (58-9), and his speech will indeed be truncated by the dawn:

Fare thee well at once:
 The glow-worm shows the matin to be near
 And gins to pale his uneffectual fire.
 Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.

(I. v. 88-90)

While appearing to act upon the wrong done him by Claudius, Old Hamlet in fact acts it out. Cut off in his description of being 'cut off', his is not a constative account but a

performative repetition of his own death.²⁸ Like the crime that made a ghost of him, his speech is a replay, a static repetition of the static repetition that killed him. Shakespeare's Ghost is thus not simply suspended repetitiously, as ghosts generally are, in the moment of its passing; for that suspension, that ghostly repetition without movement or reshaping, is internal to the very wrong for whose expiation the Ghost is doom'd to return.

Thus compelled to re-enact the re-enactment that is its death, however, it functions in excess of its role as revenge ghost. It is no coincidence that Horatio describes the spectre's rapid departure at the crowing of the cock as the departure of 'a guilty thing' (I. i. 153). For, as we have suggested, the coming of the Ghost inaugurates a repetitive concatenation of auricular violence, perpetuating at the level of the soldiers' discourse the infraction it has suffered. The singular effect of Shakespeare's more-than-generic Ghost is most clearly glimpsed in the blazon of the afterlife which it both does and does not 'unfold' to Hamlet:

Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
 To what I shall unfold [...]
 I am thy father's spirit,
 Doom'd for a certain time to walk the night,
 And for the day confin'd to fast in fires,
 Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
 Are burn't and purged away. But that I am forbid
 To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
 I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
 Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
 Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
 Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
 And each particular hair to stand on end
 Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.
 But this eternal blazon must not be
 To ears of flesh and blood. List, list O list!

²⁸ Cf. Neill's (1997) analysis of 'narrative abruption' with regard to the Ghost's speech and the play's broader frame of anxieties of 'telling': pp.216-242.

If thou didst ever thy dear father love [...]

Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

(I. v. 5-25)

It is not difficult to recognise here both Shakespeare's invocation of and his departure from the Senecan model of the self-presentation of the revenge ghost.²⁹ But let us restrict our attention to what is ostensibly 'cut off' in the Ghost's speech from the topology of hell that is traditional to the genre from which it emerges. While the revenge ghost has its roots in Greek drama, it is in Seneca's *Agamemnon* that we find the template after which the Renaissance spectre was principally designed.³⁰ There, the Ghost of Thyestes, prefacing his call for blood with an inventory of the torments of Hades—alluding to Ixion, Sisyphus, Tityus, and Tantalus—³¹ set the standard for the patterning of ghostly prologues and speeches on the English stage.³² Yet it is exactly this commonplace inventory of his prison-house that, commentators habitually point out, the Ghost claims to be forbidden to elaborate.³³ In his note to what the Ghost goes on to say, Harold Jenkins exclaims in his Arden edition of *Hamlet*, 'How much more effective than the explicit narrative of the Ghost of Andrea [...]!' (I. v. 15n.). Implicit in Jenkins' rapture is an important recognition that what Shakespeare's Ghost is prohibited from conveying is no more significant than the dimension which is added to it by that very blockage. It causes a kind of 'effect defective', as Polonius would say (II. ii. 103). The inventory of hell is not, after all, just expunged. Rather, the Ghost focuses on Hamlet *as the recipient of a message*, and replaces the generic

²⁹ The model was to some extent already a cliché by the time of the writing of *Hamlet*. A discussion, of considerable breadth, both of the model and of its resumption by Renaissance tragedians can be found in Boyle (1997) pp. 153ff.

³⁰ And, to a lesser extent, the *Thyestes*. See Miola (1992) p. 34.

³¹ Seneca's *Agamemnon* 11-28.

³² Cf. in particular the Prologue given by the Ghost of Andrea in Kyd's own supposed reworking of the Ur-*Hamlet*, *The Spanish Tragedy*.

³³ Miola (1992) p. 34; and Neill (1997) p. 224.

catalogue with a conditional description of its *effects* upon his auditor. Cut off as he is from detailing hell's torment, the Ghost articulates five precise descriptive lines of what it 'would' do to Hamlet were he to hear it (16-20). It is thus in foregrounding the effect of what it thereby claims to keep secret that the Ghost's speech manages to achieve its *greater* effect. In those generically 'defective' lines with which the spectre replaces the content it is forbidden to disclose, it unfolds the terrors of the afterlife all the better in and by its act of failing to unfold them.³⁴

Now we have so far suggested that the Ghost's narrative not only reconstructs but, in reconstructing, replays the moment of poisonous infraction which cut off Old Hamlet's life. But this cutting off of his narrative which at once makes it defective (as a generic call for revenge) and yet more effective therefore, does not simply repeat but *carries over* the singular character of the crime (the 'primal' repetition) for which it is supposed to be seeking vengeance. In being condemned to give less information than the normal generic speech of the revenge ghost, Shakespeare's spectre gives more performatively. That with which it replaces the generic itinerary lends a descriptive symmetry to the two main portions of its message, one which establishes an equivalence between the effects of Claudius's poison on Old Hamlet's blood, and the effects which the Ghost's discourse will have on Hamlet's. What must not be to ears of flesh and blood precisely and nevertheless serves to identify Hamlet's ears as a locus of penetration ('List, list, O list'). This performative equivalence is described succinctly by Michael Neill: '[the Ghost's] narrative [...] begins to act with something of the efficacy of Claudius' poison, the "leprous distillment" poured "in the porches of [the] ears" which transforms its victims with "a most

³⁴ On the Ghost's 'saying without saying', his 'folding-unfolding' cf. Royle (1995) p. 98.

instant tetter''' (Neill 1997 pp. 221-2).³⁵ It is crucial to recognise the significance of Neill's point. What is at stake in the Ghost's symptomatically cut off tale of being cut off is not a simple conveyance of information and a call for a reciprocal act of vengeance which we will witness Hamlet spending the best part of four Acts refusing or failing to undertake. It is rather the transmission and (auricular) reception of a message whose internal paradox is what makes Hamlet's prospective task so problematic. The Ghost is not *just* suspended repetitiously at the moment of its own death, speaking of being cut off (literally) under the pressure of being cut off (through prohibitions and the threat of the dawn). If the Ghost's speech is marked by a performative relation to the scene which it describes—a scene in which Old Hamlet is the *victim* of Claudius's primal repetition—it nevertheless repeats, in the act of describing it, the very gesture of Old Hamlet's own aggressor. Not only figuratively, that is, because it introduces its overdetermined message through Hamlet's ear just as Claudius had introduced the leprous distilment into his victim's; but also structurally, because, as the victim of the re-enacted murder, Old Hamlet—in re-enacting it—becomes the bearer and the legator of repetition, himself re-enacting, as Claudius had done, a preceding act of violence. As Claudius repeats Cain, so the Ghost repeats Claudius repeating him.

If we are attentive to the performative dimension of this encounter, it would appear that repetition, far from being a symptom of Hamlet's failure to carry out the command of his dead father, might rather manifest exactly what is passed on—transmitted auricularly—

³⁵ Note too that the 'harrowing' effects which the Ghost's proleptic disclaimer gestures to avoid, have *already* been shown to have taken hold in the responses of those he has earlier interpellated who are '*distill'd*/Almost to a jelly' and '*harrow[ed]* with fear' even before he announces his purpose. Cf. also Gertrude's description of the effects on Hamlet at the Ghost's second appearance to him (III. iv. 119-22):

Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
And, as the sleeping soldiers in th'alarm,
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements

from Hamlet *père* to his son; that just as the father is made a ghost of by his brother's poison, so is Hamlet made a ghost of by his father's. We will return to the peculiar scene of repetition in Ophelia's bedchamber in a moment. Let us first try to tease out more precisely the relationship of the literal to the verbal poisoning, and indeed the significance of the particular orifice which is singled out in both the *prôtarchos até* and its re-enactment as the locus of the aggressors' violence.

In the paper from which the epigram for this section is taken—'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality' (1964)—Laplanche and Pontalis stress that in Freud a 'privileged position [is] accorded to hearing' as a sensory locus of external stimulation in the production of the primal fantasies (p. 18). They offer two explanatory suggestions. The first, which directly concerns the *sensorium* in question (at least in opposition to vision), is that the ear is always open—even in sleep. If the phenomenon recurs in Freud's texts of a child awakened, and traumatised, by the noises of its parents, it is because the ears remain sensitive to any break in the continuity of an undifferentiated perceptual field—for instance, the silence of the night.³⁶ Their second suggestion is that hearing is also the sense which receives 'family *sounds* or *sayings* [...] going on prior to the subject's arrival, [and] within which he must find his way' (p. 19). It is in the realm of hearing that the history and legends of parents, grandparents and ancestors, are introduced to the subject. What unites these two suggestions—the one synchronic, the other diachronic—is that the ear in general remains the site *par excellence* of the subject's interpellation by the other. It is, as Jacques Derrida urges, also thinking of Freud, 'the most tendered, the most open organ', the one

Start up and stand on end.

³⁶ Note that Laplanche and Pontalis, still with a certain Lacanian bias, thus claim that 'the prototype of the signifier lies in the aural sphere' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1964 p. 18). It will of course be Laplanche's later charge that any stimulus incited by the other, in whatever form and to whichever *sensorium* it relates, cannot

which may be 'lent' or 'offered' to the other, and never anything but open to his message (Derrida 1985 p. 33).³⁷

Yet the very openness of this liminal sensory organ, to whose effects Freud's texts are so sensitive, is necessarily compromised. In a dense and provocative paper entitled 'Shakespeare's Ear' Joel Fineman (1991) proposes a deconstructive reading of the auricular organ as the privileged motif of a certain 'Renaissance textuality' (p. 229). I do not wish to engage with the full complexities of Fineman's argument here; but it is necessary to reproduce his invocation of a portion of the Renaissance poet John Davies' work *Nosce Teipsum* ('Know Thyself') (1599), in which Davies describes the process of 'Hearing'. It follows and deliberately contrasts with a poem on the 'immediacy of vision', identifying the ear both as the conduit of the other's voice and as the organ of *delay*:

These wickets of the *Soule* are plac'd on hie,
Because all sounds do lightly mount aloft;
And that they may not pierce too violently,
They are delayed with turnes and windings oft.

For should the voice directly strike the braine,
It would astonish, and confuse it much;
Therefore these plaits and folds the sound restriane,
That it the Organ may more gently touch.

As Streames, which with their winding banks do play,
Stopt by their creeks, run softly through the plaine,
So in the Eares labyrinth the voyce doth stray,
And doth with easie motion touch the braine.

It is the slowest yet the daintiest *Sense*.
(1005-1017; cited in Fineman 1991 p. 230)

be differentiated from a 'Symbolic' realm of signification, but must rather be relocated with the latter into the broader category of *the message*.

³⁷ This inevitably includes the subject's own address to himself. The question of signature and countersignature by which Derrida (1985) interrogates Nietzsche is taken up in relation to 'Shakespeare's' *Hamlet* by Lukacher (1994) pp. 126-141.

What is crucial about this poem is that the ear is figured as the most receptively sensitive organ ('the daintiest') and that the very structure of its receptive apparatus is therefore 'the slowest'. It is designed to receive the other and to protect against his 'too violent' penetration, which would paralyse the auditor altogether. For Fineman the ear is thus to be perceived as the locus and motif of, dilation, deferral, spacing: 'that which slows the logos, leading it astray within [its] labyrinthine folds and plaits [...] saving the brain from a too quick arrival of the sense or voicing of speech' (p. 230). Thus, he argues, 'we can understand the ear, a specifically Renaissance ear, as instrument of delay and deferral—what Derrida calls the *différance*, both spatial and temporal, that is prior to any difference whatsoever' (p. 230).³⁸ This, he suggests, helps to explain 'why for Shakespeare the ear is so often a figure of momentous suspense, as in *Hamlet* when the fall of Ilium "takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear"' (p. 230).³⁹

What we have so far said concerning Claudius's poison and the Ghost's repetitious message makes inadequate, though not irrelevant, any simple claim that Hamlet delays because the exhortation to revenge/remember specifically arrives through the organ of delay itself. Fineman's text is significant because it identifies a standard or normative Renaissance function of the auricular organ: one which Shakespeare's tragedy affirms itself in breaching. For Davies, the 'porches' of the ear (as Shakespeare's Ghost calls them), the labyrinthine folds which manifest it *externally*, and into which the other's voice speaks, equally mediate that voice and sustain the other as different, as *other*. Without being interrupted and delayed the other's message would, says Davies, 'too violently pierce' the

³⁸ The Renaissance ear, according to Fineman, is what 'determines Derrida's [1985] account of the reader's, any reader's, relation to a text, any text': Fineman (1991) p. 230.

³⁹ The suggestion remains undeveloped in Fineman's text. We shall return to the significance of this momentary paralysis in the following section.

auditor's brain. The ear's labyrinth maintains the other at arm's length. The other's difference, the mediation of his message by the folded maze of the ear, its delay and deferral, is not an aberrant communicative eventuality, but the condition of possibility for the 'proper' reception of his message.

In *Hamlet* everything which we have suggested about 'unfolding' concerns not just the verbal unfolding of the addressor's message to his addressee but also the effective unfolding of the 'folds' of the latter's ear, a direct bypassing of them and a too violent penetration of, or intromission into, the book and volume of the auditor's brain. During what the Ghost unfolds and 'fails' to unfold to Hamlet's 'serious hearing' he describes even as he re-enacts upon his auditor the violent introduction of something into the porches of his ear. In the symmetrical descriptions which the Ghost gives of the effects of his own words (I. v. 15-20) and the effects of Claudius's poison (I. v. 64-73) it is precisely the ear's winding defence against a paralysing exogenous penetration, which Davies valorises, that is rendered redundant. In the 'effective' description with which the Ghost proleptically replaces the blazon of the afterlife, his ostensibly hypothetical auditor is figured as one unequipped to process even the lightest word of his tale. The latter is literally petrifying, 'freez[ing]' its potential hearer and rendering him inert. In other words, the ear into which the Ghost 'would' speak is envisioned as incapable of mediating or, in Davies' term, 'Stop[ping]' the violence of the message. It cannot halt or dilate it: the auditor is halted and petrified—'Stopt'—by 'something too much' in the message itself. As we have noted, the Ghost claims to spare his son such trauma, and instead only to relate the trauma of his own death. Yet the description of Old Hamlet's bodily response is analogous to the hypothetical one he has just recounted. The porches of his ear offer no protection against the distilment

that is introduced into them; the poison rather ‘courses through/The natural gates and alleys of the body’, rapidly stopping his blood (I. v. 66-7). With a ‘sudden vigour’ it possets and curds, blocking his circulation altogether (I. v. 68-9). It is not without significance that the detail of the effects of Claudius’s distilment is preceded by that of the effects of speech. For the Ghost’s description of the violence done against himself thus becomes inseparable from the violence with which that description introduces into Hamlet’s ear the demand for vengeance—such that Hamlet will need to ‘wipe away all trivial fond records’, that it might ‘live alone’ in his mind (I. v. 99-103). The poison administered by Claudius and the message carried and conveyed by the Ghost thus stand in a mutual metaphorical relationship to one another, the literal ‘leperous distilment’ coursing violently through Old Hamlet’s undefended body, just as the narrative distilment of that event seizes and consumes Hamlet’s brain.

Now from the moment Hamlet’s comrades appear on the scene, immediately after Hamlet has sworn to act upon his father’s word (I. v. 113), he is already acting his father out. As they approach, they, as had Hamlet, impatiently call to hear the Ghost’s news:

Marcellus: How is’t, my noble lord?

Horatio: What news, my lord?

Hamlet: O, wonderful!

(I. v. 119-21)

If Hamlet admits that there is news, nevertheless and just like his father’s Ghost, he at once cuts them off from hearing its full content and thus also, like Hamlet himself, from relaying it:

Horatio: Good, my lord, tell it.

Hamlet: No, you will reveal it.

(I. v. 122-3)

In keeping secret the message of his dead father—in cutting it off—Hamlet does what is desired *by* the Ghost (who will demand that the others ‘Swear’ themselves to silence), but at the same time does nothing but capitulate to, which is to say *repeat* (in its peculiarity), the gesture to which we have suggested his dead father has been condemned by the manner of his death: namely to perpetuate the abruptive effects of Claudius’s poison.⁴⁰ Like his father he is paralysed into repetition. As the Ghost in reiterating itself as passive victim replicates before its auditor the active gesture of aggression which killed Old Hamlet, it is that bi-valence of active-passive by which his auditor thus becomes poisoned, or contaminated. The performative character of the Ghost’s speech places its auditor—the one to whom it makes its call for revenge—in the paradoxical situation, whereby fulfilling the Ghost’s wish for the news not to be unfolded repositions Hamlet *filis* as the one who cuts even as he is cut off.⁴¹

Repetition, paralysis, blockage are those things which in *Hamlet* mark not the failure of a subject’s inscription by an other, but the very transmission of something from one subject to another in its most traumatic form. It is precisely in the subsequent paralysis of the one who is interpellated that one can identify transmission as such.

Yet if the play establishes as the privileged trope of this transmission, or traumatic intromission, the image of auricular violence, the breaching of the function of what Fineman calls a ‘specifically Renaissance ear’, and even if, as we will suggest, it continues to affirm this trope until the last, it remains no more *than* a trope. So much should already be clear from our suggestion that the poisoning of Old Hamlet is just as much a metaphor

⁴⁰ Cf. Royle (1995) p. 99: ‘[...] in the Ghost’s speeches, one could trace all the sounds of “e(a)r(e)” —right through to the critical injunction to remember and to the final repetitions of “Swear”’.

⁴¹ Note that although Hamlet has earlier urged his comrades to ‘give [...] an understanding but no tongue’ to the phenomenon of the apparition (I. ii. 250), he assures himself in his second soliloquy that the truth will out

for the violence Old Hamlet commits ‘verbally’ on his son’s ear, as vice versa. But it is important to stress further that the traumatic communication of a message in Shakespeare’s text is not reducible to a merely verbal exchange. Poisoning in the aural sphere—literal or verbal—does not mark the limit of traumatic interpersonal exchange, but rather functions in Shakespeare’s text as the privileged emblem for (or ‘prototype’ of, to invoke Laplanche and Pontalis’s term) the traumatic reception of the other’s message as such, verbal or otherwise. Nowhere is this clearer than in the uncanny encounter between Hamlet and Ophelia. Just like the ‘original’ poisoning of the King, this scene is a reconstruction.⁴² It is articulated, and more than articulated, by a traumatised Ophelia to her father:

Ophelia: My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
 Lord Hamlet [...]
 As if he had been loosed out of hell
 To speak of horrors, he comes before me [...]
Polonius: What said he?
Ophelia: He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
 Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
 And with his other hand *thus* o’er his brow
 He falls to such perusal of my face
 As a would draw it. Long stay’d he so.
 At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
 And thrice his head *thus* waving up and down,
 He rais’d a sigh so piteous and profound
 As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
 And end his being [...]
 (II. i. 77-96, emphasis added)

Significantly, what has taken place between Ophelia and Hamlet has done so in silence. Shakespeare even emphasises the point in Polonius’s question, ‘What *said* he?’ Ophelia notably declines to remark that Hamlet ‘said’ nothing verbally, that what passed between them—or rather passed from Hamlet to her—did not in any literal sense concern something

by a kind of effect defective: ‘murder, though it have no tongue, will speak/With most miraculous organ’ (II. ii. 589-90).

⁴² Therefore a reconstruction of a reconstruction...

directed through her ears, but continues her account such that Hamlet's gestures carry no more or less force of signification. Moreover, they cease to be simply the gestures of Hamlet. 'Thus [...] thus [...] so': we emphasise these indexical signifiers because they point to Ophelia pointing to herself. Not only does she describe to her father Hamlet's ghostly appearance, which we know to be a repetition of Old Hamlet's; she herself repeats it—acts it out—before him. This scene of reconstruction is not just concerned to show the transmission of repetition from Old Hamlet to his son; Ophelia literally dramatises the silent *repetition of that transmission* which takes place from Hamlet to her.⁴³

From Claudius to Old Hamlet, Old Hamlet to his son, and young Hamlet to Ophelia and beyond, there is circulated a disabling or paralysing force of repetition by which the one who is interpellated becomes condemned to doing nothing but 'the same', replicating the singularity of the static relation which the tragedy's 'primal' crime bears to its Biblical antecedent. Ophelia repeats Hamlet repeating his father repeating his own brother, whose aggression is so peculiarly a non-reciprocal, unmodified repetition of Cain's. The stopping of the old king's circulation by the 'primal' auricular infraction of Claudius's poison becomes the defining trope of a circulation precisely *of* stoppage, of blockage and repetition, which it initiates.

We might seem to be faced, then, with a kind of paradox: namely that the text of *Hamlet* 'begins' with and sustains itself on the basis of the transmission among its protagonists of a compulsion to repeat—one which inhibits Hamlet from beginning the task of revenge that is assigned to him, compelling him to act out, rather than upon, the

⁴³ It should also be remarked that it is as a consequence of Ophelia's ghostly communication, and others 'All given to mine ear' (II. ii. 127), that Polonius volunteers to secrete himself with the King 'behind an arras' (II. ii. 163) so as to 'hear [...] all' that passes between Hamlet and his daughter (III. ii. 182). He will of course

traumatic message from his father. To call it a paradox would seem to presuppose a distinction, which would only ever be artificial, between Hamlet and *Hamlet*, the Prince and the text which carries his name. But it is a distinction that is decisively and suggestively drawn in the metadramatic scenes in which the tragedians of the city become the focus of Court interest. It is these, and the texts which the Players are called upon to enact, that we will consider in the following section. It is necessary, however, to delimit the question of the texts which the tragedians play in *Hamlet* and are called upon to play by its eponymous protagonist. A great deal has already been written—and not all of it without involving a certain degree of speculation—with the intention of determining the specific poetic and dramatic antecedents (classical or otherwise) of Shakespeare's text which it invokes in a more or less explicit manner during the Player's speech (II. ii. 464-514) and the inset drama itself. Rather than attempting to advance another textual genealogy of the play, we will be concerned with a more structural question. That is to say, not primarily with *which* antecedents Shakespeare invokes, so much as the fact *of* invocation and the manner in which it is undertaken. It is a line of enquiry which, I suggest, makes legible a similitude between the ear of Hamlet and the ear of *Hamlet*, between the relationship of Shakespeare's hero to his dead father and Shakespeare's text to its own (albeit nominal)⁴⁴ literary paternity.

Hamlet and Hamlet: revenge and the literary

The coming of the Players is formally announced to Hamlet (who thanks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern knows already) by Polonius who, in a famous phrase,

fatally repeat this gesture hidden in Gertrude's closet, as she speaks to her son, 'in the ear/Of all their conference' (III. ii. 186-7).

explicitly identifies them with the classical traditions of drama: 'Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light' (II. ii. 396). Yet if the Players are accounted the best for delivering the works of these two generic exemplars, Polonius concedes that they are equally adept at handling both the most absurd sub-genres ('tragical-historical-comical-pastoral' (II. ii. 394-5)) and texts for which no generic category can account ('scene indivisible, or poem unlimited' (II. ii. 395-6)). Thus, anticipating their performance of a revenge text into which Hamlet will insert his own interpolation, it is made clear that 'the best actors in the world' (II. ii. 392) are accounted such because of their aptitude not only for the demands made of them by classical dramatic models, but also for texts which exceed or transgress the generic codes which govern the latter: 'For the law of writ, and the liberty, these are the only men' (II. ii. 397-8).

Now, Aeneas' tale to Dido, the recitation of which Hamlet requests immediately he has welcomed the Players, seems at first to be an obvious selection, given Hamlet's own preoccupations, and the fact that the matter of the speech concerns Pyrrhus whose violent progress represents a kind of 'law of writ' for the revenge hero. As Eleanor Prosser (1971) has remarked, stressing what she regards as the intended parallel between Hamlet and Pyrrhus, the latter's slaughter of his father's killer upon the altar of Zeus in Troy generated a tradition predating *Hamlet* in which 'Pyrrhus became the symbol of the remorseless and blasphemous revenger' (p. 152). Of the several possible textual grafts which have been identified in the speech,⁴⁵ perhaps the most venerable of those literary antecedents upholding the tradition to which Prosser refers is Virgil's *Aeneid*. Yet, in his notes on

⁴⁴ And therefore no less fictional than the Ghost of Old Hamlet.

⁴⁵ Prosser (1971) cites Marlowe and Nashe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, George Peele's *Tale of Troy*, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Luckacher (1994) makes an original and compelling case for Euripides' (untranslated) *Hecuba*: pp. 137-8.

Shakespeare, Coleridge who finds the whole speech ‘admirable’, is not altogether correct in perceiving it as a ‘substitution of the epic for the dramatic’ (Coleridge 1808-19 p. 167).

After all, Hamlet makes clear that the narrative speech belongs to a drama, albeit one which ‘was never acted, or if it was, not above once’ (II. ii. 430-1).⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Coleridge alerts us to a peculiarity which belies the obviousness of Hamlet’s selection and calls us to reassess the status of this inset fragment within the play: namely that Hamlet does not choose a speech *of* Pyrrhus, but a speech *about* him. The role the actor is called upon to play is not that of Pyrrhus, the remorseless filial avenger, but Aeneas who retrospectively reproduces for his lover the tale of the former’s vengeance in narrative form. Here is how Hamlet begins to motivate the First Player to speak the desired lines:

If it live in your memory, begin at this line—let me
see, let me see—
The rugged Pyrrhus, like th’Hyrceanian beast—
‘Tis not so. It begins with Pyrrhus—
The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms [...]
(II. ii. 443-448)

In Hamlet’s exhortation, we witness him (try to) remember the Player’s original recitation which—as is clear from his reference to the Player’s memory (443)—was no less than a feat of recollection itself. Yet the role he remembers the Player remembering is exactly that of the one who remembers: Aeneas. The enacting of the Trojan’s narrative of Pyrrhus’ revenge is the reproduction of what was originally a reproduction, the remembrance of a remembrance. Thus the swift and gory model of the avenging son which is presented in the Player’s speech cannot just be regarded as a kind of built-in ideal of revenge which Hamlet may or may not live up to. The text which the Player is asked to recite is one in which the

⁴⁶ The question mark over the fictitious text’s performance history might define it either as a closet drama, or following on from Polonius’s introduction, pseudo-Senecan.

model of revenge—its law of writ—is itself always already a memory. By definition, Pyrrhus is encrypted within *Hamlet* as an anachronism.

Moreover, even once he has heard again the tale of Pyrrhus, Hamlet refuses to identify with him, preferring rather, in his soliloquy, to compare his own inaction with all that the Player himself might accomplish had he the same paternal ‘motive and [...] cue’ (see II. ii. 555 ff.). Might this apparently perverse identification with the Player—the double remembrancer: he who to ‘act’ must remember his lines, and in doing so fulfils the role of the epic remembrancer—be determined by the singularity of his own father’s mnemonic demand for vengeance?⁴⁷ The answer, I suggest, resides in the fact that just as Hamlet’s dead father calls to his son for remembrance, so is the violent literary model of revenge encrypted within Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* already a ghost, both present and absent, which calls for a very specific kind of ‘remembrance’.

The similitude between these two potential scenes of ancestral demand (the one familial, the other textual) is clarified by Ned Lukacher. In his *Daemonic Figures* (1994), he focuses on a crucial moment in the Player’s speech which marks the central division between Hamlet and Pyrrhus—that is, the notorious but transitory moment of the revenger’s delay, the moment of his ‘doing nothing’ in which Hamlet appears to get stuck:

*Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide;
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
Th’unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium,
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus’ ear. For lo, his sword,
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam, seem’d i’t’h air to stick;
So as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
And like a neutral to his will and matter,*

⁴⁷ Hamlet’s hope that the speech still ‘live[s] in [the Player’s] memory’, of course recalls his own pledge that the memory of his father ‘alone shall live/Within the book and volume of [his] brain’.

Did nothing.

(II. ii. 468-78)

The silent moment of nothingness in which this passage culminates is ultimately overcome by the Greek as he takes vengeance like a storm after ‘*A silence in the heavens*’ (II. ii. 480). But in the noise of Ilium’s fall which transitorily paralyses him, Lukacher hears, as ‘a signature-like effect’, the name of Shakespeare strewn like an acrostic through the (albeit fictional) text he invokes (Lukacher 1994 p. 135):

*and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus’ ear.*

In the moment—which is only a moment—of Pyrrhus’ delay we read a signature:

‘Sh...akes...Pyr...ear’: ‘Shakespyrrhus’ ear’ (Lukacher 1994 p. 135). Shakespeare’s name appears in the moment his text claims to cite its literary antecedent, as if his ear, or rather, the ear of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, is taken prisoner by the crash of its textual ancestor. As Hamlet with his ‘tables’ before the ghost of his father calling for vengeance, so is the book and volume of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* inscribed by its own ‘paternal’ other which carries the generic model of a vengeful son.

Now insofar as Hamlet has requested to hear a text in which revenge is already a memory, and, further, finds more with which to identify in the actor than the violent subject of his recited tale, he would seem self-consciously to position himself at two removes from the archaic Greek model. Yet the inscription of that model within the text which bears his name—even its ‘presence’ as a memory—cannot but mark its resurrection and continuation in some form. Even as an anachronism the revenge model of Pyrrhus remains inscribed within *Hamlet*, if only as the model of what Shakespeare’s text *is* not; which in being inscribed by it as an anachronism Shakespeare’s text *is* already not simply repeating, but in

whose wake it nevertheless declares itself to function as a revenge text. The ‘crash’ in the Player’s speech marks the destruction and decline of Ilium even as it makes, literally, Shakespeare’s name, as if the figurative decomposition of the antecedent is necessary for the composition of Shakespeare’s play as a signable (i.e. unique) text in its own right. That Shakespeare’s signature should thus become readable within the ephemeral moment of the archaic revenger’s paralysis signals a curious bifurcation between the trajectory of *Hamlet* and its eponymous hero, although paradoxically the two divergent paths are absolutely co-dependent. I am not suggesting that we take Lukacher’s point on the Shakespearean cryptonym literally; it is unclear quite how literal Lukacher himself perceives it. But I do propose that it helps us to formulate a structural basis for the understanding of Hamlet’s notorious tardiness. In Hamlet’s very act of failing to identify with Pyrrhus—and even actively distancing himself from him—or, in other words and more generally, in failing to assume the role of the revenger, Shakespeare’s text affirms itself *as* Shakespeare’s text in not statically repeating its nominal literary ancestor. The more Hamlet ‘does nothing’ the more *Hamlet* does something in transgressing and exceeding the law of writ which it preserves within itself in the tale of Pyrrhus’ revenge. If Hamlet were to lay his father’s ghost to rest by avenging him without delay (without ‘doing nothing’), Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* would be a static—un-reshaped—repetition of the tale of Pyrrhus.⁴⁸ It is insofar as Hamlet does, for four acts ‘do nothing’, that Shakespeare’s text reshapes/is enabled to reshape and extend the pattern of literary revenge which it claims as its textual heritage.

⁴⁸ We could, perhaps, say that it would not therefore be ‘Shakespeare’s’ text, just as Hamlet is no longer himself but a ghost (the Ghost) or daemon (as Garber says) as he bids ‘adieu’ to Ophelia in her closet. The upshot of this claim would not be to imply that even the most commonplace revenge tragedies are absolutely identical with one another, but, rather, to insist on what Derrida has formalised as the ‘law of genre’ (1979): any text, in order to be recognised within the genre to which its forebears belong, must, in however small a way, be singular, transgressive and *non-generic*; in short: somehow different.

Hamlet's identification with the Player can thus be seen to signal a metadramatic turn in which is revealed the paradoxical relationship of *Hamlet* to itself, or rather to its eponymous hero. Both *Hamlet* and Hamlet are figured as having an ancestral voice auricularly inscribed within them. Yet it is precisely inasmuch as Hamlet is unable to act *upon* his dead father's word that the text of *Hamlet* is prohibited/prohibits itself from simply acting *out*—repeating—its own (textual) antecedent. Even as Hamlet refuses to identify with Pyrrhus and valorises the Player, Polonius's formal introduction of the troupe becomes a gloss on the very text which bears the hero's name, preserving as it does within it the generic law of revenge even as it dramatises and is itself 'the liberty', the constitutive transgression of those codes of that law.

This contradiction between the fates of Hamlet and *Hamlet*, whereby only one 'Hamlet', as it were, can be relieved from becoming the repetitious ghost of his or its forefather, has everything to do with the questions of legacy and tradition, and the possibility of the anti-traditional, with which we began. Shakespeare's tragedy affirms itself—and affirms its *modernity*—in dramatising the impossibility not just of repetition without difference, but of difference without repetition. As we saw earlier, by way of Nietzsche Paul de Man identifies the posture of modernity as the forgetting of history, the severance of the present from anteriority and tradition. It is a posture to which de Man, after Nietzsche, is led to ascribe that most Oedipean of symbolic acts, parricide (de Man 1969 pp. 149-50). Yet he goes on to show that far from being an anti-traditional gesture, this figurative parricide is the enabling principle of tradition as such. 'If history', he says, 'is not to become sheer regression or paralysis, it depends on modernity for its duration and renewal' (p. 151). If modernity aims parricidally to sever itself from history, to attempt the

‘new’, then we must not overlook the fact that severance and difference are nevertheless the conditions of possibility for the history which it claims to reject. Without them history would not be history but pure repetition: modernity may kill its father, but that father killed, had to have killed his. De Man thus presents us with a paradox: tradition would be impossible without difference; but by the same token, in differing from, forgetting, or murdering one’s predecessor one is already repeating him, remembering him, perpetuating his legacy. Now for de Man, this paradox characterises ‘the distinctive nature of literature’ as such (p. 161). His principal focus, to be sure, is such modernist figures as Baudelaire and Artaud. Their claims for a ‘new beginning’ he rapidly shows to belong equally to the literary ancestors from whom they declare their independence. Thus that declaration, while it heralds something ‘new’, constitutes a repetition, if only, and especially, of the desire not to repeat.⁴⁹ The more a text affirms its difference—and *is* ‘different’—from what has gone before, the more strongly it repeats its ancestor in its gesture of differing. This double-bind, for de Man, constitutes an ‘unbearable’ condition which is both necessary for literature but from which it cannot escape (p. 162). Yet, however artificial it may ultimately be, the self-division and contradiction which *Hamlet* establishes with itself (or between itself and its hero), while it cannot of course escape from it sets forth this double-bind both as the condition of its composition and the determining factor of its action (and inaction). Firstly, because it bears within itself (at Hamlet’s request) an antecedent text whose form Shakespeare’s own will affirm itself in being different from. In being a ‘new’ and signable text Shakespeare’s does not just do away with (‘forget’ or ‘murder’) the ancestral revenge

⁴⁹ Note in particular de Man’s citation (p. 162) of Derrida’s paper on Artaud (1966b): “[Artaud] was unable to resign himself to a theater based on repetition, unable to renounce a theatre that would do away with all forms of repetition”. See also Derrida (1966b) p. 314, where the ‘pure presence as absolute difference’ aspired to in Artaud’s theatre is linked explicitly with the murder of the father.

model; it preserves within it the memory of that over which it asserts its own identity and whose heritage it therefore extends. Secondly, because entailed in *Hamlet*'s very difference from that ancestral model is the cost that its namesake must bear of doing nothing less than repeat his father. *Hamlet* differs in that Hamlet repeats. Internal to its difference, its identity as 'Shakespeare's' text, is repetition. The more *Hamlet* does something, the more Hamlet will be doing nothing, and vice versa. Through its divided relation to itself—*Hamlet*'s relation to Hamlet—Shakespeare's text mobilises de Man's 'unbearable' double-bind as its sustaining force.

Thus, in the most blatant moment before Act V in which Hamlet will be presented with the gift of an opportunity to take his revenge, an extraordinary 'nothing' is made to happen. When Claudius attempts to pray for forgiveness, Hamlet comes upon him. With Claudius kneeling, vulnerable, Hamlet 'could [...] do it pat' (III. iii. 73). Indeed, this opportunity is one which would make his revenge most akin to that of Pyrrhus whose aged victim dies seeking refuge at the altar of Zeus. But having drawn his sword, Hamlet pauses:

And am I then reveng'd,
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and season'd for his passage?
No.

(III. iii. 84-7)

His self-restraint seems well motivated, preferring as he does to wait until Claudius is 'about some act/That has no relish of salvation in't' (III. iii. 91-2). On his exit, however, the King breaks off:

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

(III. iii. 97-8)

The ear of God, unlike any other in the text, has been closed. ‘After all’, says Dover Wilson, ‘there had been no “relish of salvation” in the King’s act of prayer; Hamlet need not have hesitated [...]’ (1935 p. 246). It is as if *Hamlet* has had its own jest at Hamlet’s expense. It is not that Hamlet is *congenitally* unable to kill Claudius, but rather that the text generates the tantalising possibility of Hamlet’s becoming a Pyrrhus then contrives to withdraw it and thus perpetuate *itself* a little longer. Hamlet is led to remain cut off, his own sword seeming to stick i’t’h’air, at the very moment of ‘doing nothing’ in Aeneas’ tale where Shakespeare’s signature takes shape.⁵⁰ Like his father’s ghost, cut off at the moment of cutting off, Hamlet is frozen into another repetition.

Ingesting poison/poisoning in jest: The Mousetrap

The singular relationship of Hamlet to the ghost of his father, which we have attempted to define in terms of intromission, might, then, be considered as the flagrant exhibition within *Hamlet* of that which de Man claims to be essential to, yet consistently disowned by, ‘modern’ literary writing—namely the fact of inevitable repetition. So what of the Prince at the expense of whose ability to carry out the Ghost’s command, to take up the legacy of vengeance left by his dead father, Shakespeare’s text takes up ‘its’ legacy, at once announcing the death of the archaic revenge model yet acting in its name, preserving its memory and extending its tradition? And what are the stakes of this quasi-competitive relationship?

⁵⁰ That the cause of Hamlet’s hesitation is thus a kind of structural joke—though also of course a structural necessity—rather than a congenital lack of will on his own part, is confirmed by his ready zeal in killing the secreted Polonius in Gertrude’s closet, the one ‘in the ear/Of all their conference’ (see note 43 above) whom Hamlet takes for his better (III. iv. 33). Even in this murder which is carried through to completion, Hamlet, who as revenger will have done nothing again in mistakenly killing Polonius, himself produces a second laugh at his own expense, exclaiming even as he thrusts his sword through the arras and into what he thinks is the Mouse trapped by his play. ‘A rat!’ (III. iv. 23).

Before taking up these questions directly, let us make a few provisional remarks concerning the contemporary cultural transformations which are often invoked in support of the aforementioned critical claim that revenge equates to a remembering.

If Protestant upheavals in commemorative practise amounted to a doctrinal imperative that the living *forget* the deceased, it is crucial to recognise—and to understand that Shakespeare's text recognises—that this new duty of amnesia complicates rather than enables the posture of modernity—forgetting the dead—in the terms by which we have suggested *Hamlet* has been construed. Indeed, in the paper cited by Michael Neill, Natalie Zemon Davies points out that the doctrinal transformations of the Reformation were profoundly counterproductive:

Especially the living [she explains] were left with their memories, unimpeded and untransformed by any ritual communication with their dead. Some memories bite the conscience. Paradoxically, in trying to lay all ghosts forever, the Protestants may have raised new ones...the ending of Purgatory and ritual mourning, whatever energies were thereby freed for other work, may have left Protestants [...] less removed from their parents, more alone with their memories, more vulnerable to the prick of the past, more open to the family future.

(Davies 1977 p. 96)⁵¹

It is not difficult to see how the early modern revenge ghost might be understood as one of those raised by the newly frustrated consciences of the living. Equally importantly, however, it should be remarked that the burden left with the living that Davies describes, which is recognisably the burden carried by Hamlet even before his encounter with the Ghost, is not one of liberation from the dead. For Hamlet, as for the laden Protestant conscience in general, there *is* remembrance, there is no end of remembrance; but that is exactly the point. Insofar as the new impotence of the living is envisioned as paradoxically having given rise to more ghosts, the function of commemorative action—be it sacred ritual

or a secular substitute like revenge—shows itself to be both grounded in and the grounds for a necessary amnesia. Duties done in the name and memory of the dead are, simultaneously, rituals of separation, procedures of laying to rest, disposing, and in short, forgetting. Prayers, masses, indulgences: the posthumous rituals outlawed by the Reformation left the living at one stroke without means of remembrance *and* without means of attenuating the ‘biting’ of memory of the deceased therefore. In forbidding mourning and requiring the living to forget, the new theological doctrine requires the impossible; the one is the means to the other. As Freud puts it in 1917: ‘[In commemorative rituals,] [e]ach single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, *and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it*’ (Freud 1917 [1915] p. 245, emphasis added). The subject remembers, ritually, (in order) to forget. In this connection, let us recall Freud’s earlier account of his dream regarding his own father’s funeral. The double inscription addressed to the dreamer reads:

the
You are requested to close eye(s)
an

Setting aside Marjorie Garber’s biographical understanding of the meaning of the message,⁵² can we not perceive in its double imperative the very structure of mourning? In closing the eyes of the dead, enacting a rite of passage on the behalf of the dead, the mourner begins to bid farewell: he begins to detach himself from the dead other, to ‘wink at’ the lost object and forget. The message is written doubly because mourning presupposes an inseparably double function: the ritual carried out for the dead other, on the other’s behalf, is *equally* a valedictory gesture from the living. Mourning operates, ideally at least,

⁵¹ Also cited by Neill (1997) p. 244.

⁵² Though not *necessarily* to invalidate it.

in the name of the living as well as the dead: it is a laying to rest in order to accomplish a letting-go.

With this in mind (and it is a model which we will shortly be attempting to develop and complicate), let us suggest that the co-ordinates within which Hamlet must operate if he is to act upon his father's demand and not just act it out become legible during the metadramatic scenes in which the (already artificial) distinction between himself and *Hamlet* is most patently dissolved: that is, during *The Murder of Gonzago*, for which he becomes by turns, playwright, chorus, prompter and epilogue.

It is as a direct yet tellingly ambiguous result of Hamlet's encounter with the Ghost that, confronted with the fortuitous arrival of the Players, Hamlet resolves to have staged his amended version of *The Murder of Gonzago*. This ambiguity concerns Hamlet's ultimate motivation. Having just heard the First Player's recitation of Aeneas' tale, Hamlet appears in his second soliloquy spontaneously to strike upon the idea of the play as no more than a trick to catch Claudius's conscience:

About, my brains! Hum—I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play,
Have, by the very cunning of the scene,
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions [...]
I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle.

(II. ii. 584-592)

Yet his resolution seems to produce a second bird to kill with the same stone:

The spirit I have seen
May be a devil, and the devil hath power
T'assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy [...]
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative than this.

(II. ii. 594-600)

The double motive behind the staging of the play—testing Claudius’s conscience and the veracity of the apparition—elicits two significant factors which we shall have to bear in mind. The first concerns the fact of Hamlet’s doubting his father, or at least the latter’s ghost.⁵³ For the reception of the father’s message is, naturally enough, the primary condition of possibility for its being doubted. Indeed, insofar as *The Murder of Gonzago* dramatises an auricular poisoning, it replicates the moment of aggression we have witnessed replicated upon Hamlet himself. The traumatising message is both necessarily prior to Hamlet’s doubt of its truth, and determines (or overdetermines) the character of the test which Hamlet engineers. It should be remembered, furthermore, that even as the best players of Seneca are enacting their tragedy, *Hamlet* assumes a radically ‘un’-Senecan posture. Whereas, say, the Thyestean banquet in *Titus Andronicus*, or ‘Soliman and Persida’ in *The Spanish Tragedy* constitute elaborate stagings which, faithful to the Senecan model, work to achieve revenge, however much Hamlet’s dramatic test seeks to secure the motivation for his revenge, the acting of *Gonzago* ultimately defers it, repeats the repetitious scene(s) of poisoning rather than avenges the ‘primal’ crime. The second factor to consider, one which will expand considerably, is that of identification. The rhyme with which Hamlet’s speech closes—‘the play’s the thing/Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King’ (II. ii. 600-1)—follows on directly from his words about the dubiety of the Ghost, and remains sufficiently ambiguous, in its invocation of the titular ‘King’, as to refer potentially both to Claudius and Old Hamlet. The double motive of the test—itself a re-enactment of the poisoning performed on Old Hamlet by Claudius, then on young Hamlet

⁵³ I am referring here in particular to Lacan’s notion, taken up by Garber, that Hamlet’s doubt is a symptom of the failure of paternal inscription. See Lacan (1964) pp. 34-5; Garber 1987 pp. 131-2.

by his father—thus establishes an implicit identification between the dead king who has made the call for vengeance and the living king upon whom that vengeance is to be taken.

If the dumbshow and the play which follows it are repetitions of the ‘primal’ crime, they cannot, of course, be just its neutral re-staging. Like the Ghost’s repetition which determines the dramatic production, in expressing the manner of the king’s poisoning the dumbshow and the play themselves constitute, or reconstitute, the form of a poison. ‘Will the King hear this piece of work?’ Hamlet asks Polonius (III. ii. 46-7), invoking, unremarkably, the *sensorium* by which Shakespeare’s contemporaries would ‘take in’ a play, though one which the pattern of the text has already overdetermined as the locus of violent, traumatic entry. ‘And the Queen too’, Polonius responds (III. ii. 48); and during the play Hamlet will gloss that portion which most pertains to his mother—the Player Queen’s protestations of eternal fidelity—as ‘wormwood’ to her, a poisonous test of the conscience of the Queen (III. ii. 176).⁵⁴ More explicit, however, is his response to Claudius’s query, at a suitable break in the action, as to whether there is ‘any offence’ in the play: ‘No, no, they do but jest—poison in jest’ (III. ii. 227-8). In what is ostensibly a claim about the action onstage a pun is concealed, and marked, by the hyphen which separates the feigned gesture of reassurance about the fictitious character of the action (‘it is but in jest, in play, that they poison’) from what is made a darker warning of its effects on the guilty: there is poison in jest, poison in play: the play is poisonous. Thus Hamlet’s response sounds rather like an anticipation of the imperative with which he will ultimately finish off his uncle, ‘Drink off this potion’ (V. ii. 331): they do but poison in jest—hear more and ingest poison yourself.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Note that as well as the identification which the play, as test, sets up between Claudius and Old Hamlet, Hamlet’s renaming of the play *The Mousetrap* means that its effects are equally to be sought upon Gertrude, for whom ‘mouse’ is Claudius’s term of endearment (III. iv. 185).

⁵⁵ Cf. Anderson (1991) p. 306.

So in re-enacting the poisoning the play re-enacts the Ghost's re-enactment: *it* poisons; even as it recapitulates the crime of the past, it renews and repeats it in the 'present'.⁵⁶ Moreover, the dumbshow which precedes the play proper is unique in Renaissance drama in being little other than an anticipatory pantomime of what will follow.⁵⁷ Unlike others of its kind, it is distinctively not an introductory allegory or symbolic staging to be unpacked and elaborated in the spoken play. Even if in *Hamlet* the latter makes the dumbshow verbally 'explicable', it is never more than a replaying of it, a repetition, just as the Ghost's speech to Hamlet repeats Claudius's silent crime in and by giving voice to it. *Gonzago* thus stands as a repetition of the poisoning, but also, in repeating *itself* repeating, as the repetition of its very repetition. The King, oddly untroubled witnessing his own crime in the dumbshow,⁵⁸ rises perturbed only when its re-enactment reaches his ear, figuratively poisoned, like Hamlet, '[u]pon the *talk* of the poisoning' (III. ii. 284, emphasis added). Like the 'primal' crime done to Old Hamlet, and replicated by him to his son, it is less the act of poisoning revealed in the play than its status as a static repetition which here engenders and perpetuates its traumatising—poisonous—force.

But if Claudius is traumatised (poisoned) by the repetitious performance of his own repetitious crime, it is often remarked that he is frightened by the repetition to come which the ambivalent figure of its poisoner, Lucianus, heralds. In the play, having spoken three bloodthirsty preparatory couplets, Lucianus '*Pours poison in the sleeper's ears*' (III. ii. 254 S.D.):

⁵⁶ Like the other performative repetitions we have witnessed, the poisoning which Hamlet's *Gonzago* re-enacts transmits like a poison to its principal auditor the very compulsion to repeat that motivates the re-enactment and that which is re-enacted. His own conscience sharply pricked by the play, Claudius, whose ear has been Hamlet's manifest target, can only seek salvation in a paradox. He is seized by a compulsion to pray: which is to say, to repeat his crimes, albeit futilely, in the ear of God (III. iii. 36-72).

⁵⁷ See Mehl (1965) pp. 112-3. Cf. Dover Wilson (1935) pp. 144-5.

⁵⁸ On the consternation this has caused among critics and directors see Edelman (1994).

Hamlet: A poisons him 'i'th' garden for his estate. His name's
Gonzago. The story is extant, and written in very
choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer
gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

Ophelia: The King rises.

(III. ii. 255-9)

In poisoning the King's ear, and attaining his wife and estate, Lucianus is clearly a cipher for Claudius the regicide. Yet Hamlet has already informed the auditors that Lucianus is 'nephew to the king' (III. ii. 239), such that he also becomes a potential figure for Hamlet whose task is the murder of his own uncle. Thus it has been argued elsewhere that what frights Claudius as much as witnessing the repeated re-enactment of his own crime, is the promise which it carries of its re-enactment as revenge. Indeed, for Michael Neill, precisely this implicit threat generated by the ambivalence of Lucianus embeds Hamlet in the constitutive paradox of revenge tragedy: 'The dream of re-membering the violated past and destroying a tainted order is fulfilled only at the cost of repeating the violation and spreading the taint' (1997 p. 251). However, do not the terms by which the staging of the inset play is defined demand a more careful assessment of the kind of 'repetition' which would be involved were Hamlet literally to poison his uncle and avenge his father? After all, *The Mousetrap* is in itself evidence of the fact that Hamlet is so busy 'repeating' the crime that he cannot avenge it. Insofar as the play *is* a repetition, the scene of Lucianus' poisoning the King's ear, which so pricks Claudius's conscience—which poisons *his* ear—would seem to double up rather as a representation *en abyme* of the fact of Hamlet's staging of it, his acting out of, rather than upon, the scene of which his father's ghost has performatively informed him. *The Mousetrap*, that is, even as it snaps shut, seems to suggest that repetition, while it is structural to the possibility of revenge, is purely in itself

not just an insufficient means of attaining it, but a means by which, in theory, it could very well be endlessly deferred.

Equally, though, the play-within-the-play encodes the logic only according to which Hamlet's vengeance, the taking up of his legacy, might become a possibility: the very logic by which the text has sustained itself in order not to become a ghostly repetition of its ancestor.

If Lucianus embodies both Claudius and Hamlet, then the Player King whom he poisons must embody both Kings of whom the *Gonzago* play is a test: Claudius and Old Hamlet. Beneath the usual construal of the enacted murder representing at once Claudius's poisoning of Hamlet *père* and Hamlet *fil'*'s figurative/theatrical and entirely repetitious poisoning of Claudius, a third possibility is opened up by the ambivalence of the victim: namely the suggestion that if Hamlet were literally to poison Claudius, to take vengeance in the name of his father, he would be repeating the 'primal' crime not only in the moral sense of reinscribing the violation for which he seeks payment from the King, but in the symbolic sense that he would be killing his own father the King again. This ostensibly perverse suggestion finds support elsewhere in the *Gonzago* play, and specifically in relation to the mnemonic character of the Ghost's demand.

The Player King, so clearly a cipher for Old Hamlet, is equally an embodiment of his ghost. Indeed, by the time he speaks in the play proper, his murder has already taken place once in the dumbshow. When he speaks to his wife concerning her future after his death, his words are already posthumous, articulated, as it were, from the perspective of the

dead.⁵⁹ Yet, unlike the Ghost, who calls only to be remembered, the already dead Player King advocates pragmatic amnesia. In his long and dense speech to the Player Queen (*'I do believe you think what now you speak'* (III. ii. 181ff.)) he forewarns that however strong her intentions of fidelity once he has departed, they will deteriorate inevitably in his absence, and she will remarry: *'most necessary 'tis that we forget'* (III. ii. 187). For Hamlet, who clearly has one eye on his mother (III. ii. 176, 219 and 226), the speech and the Player Queen's insistent protestations that the memory of her first husband will endure eternally (*'In second husband let me be accurst'* (III. ii. 174)) function principally to jab at Gertrude's conscience. In so perceiving the situation, however, he ignores the fact that her forgetting and remarrying are nevertheless the desire of her present husband. This, allied to the further fact that the Player King's speech bears crucial elements of equivocation and ambiguity that make it equally an address to Hamlet himself, but to which he remains similarly deaf:⁶⁰ *'Purpose'*, the Player King pronounces, *'is but the slave to memory'* (III. ii. 183). With regard to Hamlet's expectant glances at his mother, the line is manifestly intended to articulate what he regards as her infidelity: the intention (purpose) of remaining faithful to your first husband lasted only so long as his life; it faded with your memory of him. Yet it is also difficult not to hear in this, contrariwise, a diagnosis of the condition which inhibits and blunts Hamlet's purpose of revenge: namely that it is enslaved by the domineering memory of his father, suspended and unactable so long as all Hamlet does is remember, re-embody, and repeat his traumatic address. Similarly, the Player King's couplet, *'Most necessary 'tis that we forget/To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt'* (III.

⁵⁹ Note also that throughout her references to her husband's death the Player Queen assumes, without question from the Player King, that the manner of his death will be murder, as if both, like the audience, are only awaiting its (re)enactment.

ii. 187-8) reads like a gloss on Gertrude's 'infidelity'. Harold Jenkins tries to secure the term 'necessary' as referring to what is in the nature of things, to what is 'most natural': thus, 'Our resolves [in this instance, posthumous fidelity], being debts to ourselves only, inevitably remain unpaid' (III. ii. 187-8 n.). Again, this sounds like a peculiar way of unsettling Gertrude, given that the Player King is in fact condoning and describing as natural precisely what she has done in remarrying. Yet the equivocation of 'necessary' invites a second, quite different construal, again most pertinent to Hamlet and his paternally assigned task: it is morally requisite that we forget the dead (close one eye *to* them) *in order to* pay our debts to ourselves, in order not to remain eternally indebted to the deceased.

Now both these equivocal axioms, sound in their implicit meaning rather like the Nietzschean principle identified by Garber—the necessity of 'forgetting' in order to undertake any action. But they are ultimately more complex. When the Player King addresses his wife and urges her to forget him, he is not urging the exact opposite of what the Ghost urges in calling upon Hamlet to 'Remember me'. Being forgotten is the *will* of the ('dead') Player King; it is therefore no less a mnemonic injunction. What is at stake here is not a freedom but a *duty* to forget. I/you/he forget(s): the closed relation between the subject and the verb in its usual conjugation is troubled once 'forget' becomes an imperative. He who forgets fails to recall, is unable to remember, he neglects something or leaves it behind by mistake. He who is told to forget cannot, by definition, fail or neglect to recall, but rather must succeed in actively not recalling. He must not forget to forget, he must remember to forget. But also, and insofar as this forgetting is the will of the 'dead'

⁶⁰ Niell (1997) suggests that the speech is Hamlet's own inserted composition (p. 260). If it were at all provable it would only strengthen our argument by revealing Hamlet to be deaf even to his own insights.

other, he forgets the other in the other's name: he forgets in order the better to remember him.⁶¹ The will of the Player King is thus structured as a double-bind: remember to forget, forget (in order) to remember: close my eyes (ritually) and your eyes (valedictorily); for the two things are not separable, but symmetrical and symmetrically necessary. This is not, however, to imply that the Player King's will demands the impossible. On the contrary his double-bind expresses an enabling principle that is all but evacuated from the Ghost's imperative to Hamlet. The morbid figure in black at the beginning of the play already can do nothing but remember his father; and the visitation from the Ghost does nothing to alter this. The son who is told to revenge is disabled in advance in being compelled also only to remember (and 'not forget' (III. iv. 110)). It is insofar as Hamlet does (nothing but) remember, repeat and re-enact the encounter with his dead father, that he is unable to avenge the horror imparted performatively to him. In contrast with the disabling injunction of the Ghost, the logic of the Player King's speech (close my/your eyes) recapitulates that by which we have said the progress of the text of *Hamlet* is sustained: the double-bind that is the 'unbearable' yet necessary condition of history and tradition, in which the forefather must be forgotten or killed precisely so that his legacy may be taken up and not simply re-enacted. So long as Hamlet remains compelled solely to remember, his father's perturbed ghost cannot be lain to rest.

Now as the Player Queen persists in her protestations, as deaf as Hamlet to the revealing logic of her husband's will, the *Gonzago* play continues, on a manifest level, to hold a mirror of guilt up to Claudius and Gertrude:

*P. Queen: [New] love must needs be treason in my breast.
In second husband let me be accurst;*

⁶¹ This paradoxical formulation is discussed and elaborated by Geoffrey Bennington (2000a) in relation to modernity, Sade's legacy and the instruction in his will that he be forgotten.

None wed the second but who killed the first [...]

*A second time I kill my husband dead,
When second husband kisses me in bed.*

(III. ii. 173-80)

It is easy to see why Hamlet has selected *The Murder of Gonzago*. For it establishes through the Player Queen's pronouncements of her faithful 'purpose' an identification between the one who kills the king and the one who forgets him and, in forgetting him, repeats the act of murder, kills the king a 'second time'.⁶² The play's villain Lucianus thus embodies the forgetful Player Queen (and, by extension, Gertrude) as well as Claudius ('*None wed the second but who killed the first*').

The irony, however, is that what Hamlet so loathes about others who are not his father's son and whose transgressions he stages in *The Mousetrap*—those who, like Gertrude have forgotten him, and indeed Claudius who made a ghost of him in the first place—is the key to the possibility of his really becoming a Lucianus, one who will literally poison the King and thereby send his own father the King back to the grave. To say so is not to attempt a moral condonation of the actions of Claudius or his new wife. It is to suggest that the representation of the ambivalent Lucianus poisoning the ambivalent Player King presents—even as the trap snaps shut and the play is cut off—the possibility of revenge which has not been made available by the singularly mnemonic demand of his father that lives alone in his brain. Hamlet 'does nothing' because he can do nothing but remember his father, act him out. Insofar as he (only) remembers he repeats, and the ghost of his father returns, both to him and through him. Vengeance, that which will lay his father's spirit to rest, is thus also that which the overpowering (poisoning) presence of his

father's ghost inhibits. As such, 'doing something', avenging the memory of his father, is only possible at the cost of not purely repeating him, not only remembering him, as the Ghost seems contradictorily to desire. Hamlet cannot carry out his father's 'law of writ' without a degree of 'liberty'. If, as Michael Neill suggests, the Ghost articulates *Hamlet's* 'great discovery' of the equivalence between revenge and remembrance, the double-bind which remembrance of the dead must of necessity entail is expunged entirely from the traumatic message to his son. Pure remembrance is pure repetition—that which inhibits the revenge which in consigning his father's ghost to the grave would make him, precisely, no more than a memory. The cost of acting in his father's memory is that he must forget him a little if he is to avenge him at all. He must forget if he is to remember:

the
You are requested to close eye(s)
an

It is in forgetting, precisely, that he will kill his father 'a second time', laying his ghost finally to rest; and it is in that quasi-parricidal gesture that he will act in rather than out his father's traumatic posthumous memory.

What Hamlet will later say of the Gravedigger's riddling language applies equally well to the 'dead' Player King's speech in relation to the text of *Hamlet*: its equivocation has the power to undo it (cf. V. i. 134). The latent message which it carries, and to which Hamlet, busy watching his mother and uncle, seems unable to attend, articulates the necessitous double-bind that the dead father's imperative omits, marks out the paradox of remembering/forgetting without which Hamlet's revenge would be impossible and Shakespeare's text therefore interminable. Whether or not it is true, or even empirically

⁶² Later, in his mother's closet, Hamlet will signal his agreement with the Player Queen's self-accusations, responding to Gertrude calling the mistaken slaughter of Polonius 'a rash and bloody deed': 'Almost as bad,

verifiable, the tradition that Shakespeare acted the role of the Ghost on stage is telling. The repetitious call of the Ghost which compels Hamlet to repeat is the very motor of the difference of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as revenge text. The more Hamlet (just) repeats, the more strongly *Hamlet* outdoes, exceeds, thus heralds the death of its literary ancestor whose tradition it thereby perpetuates all the better. The less Hamlet is able to grasp the double-bind of the Player King's speech, the more the text in relation to its nominal literary paternity is enabled by its fundamental principle.

Killing (for) the father: a 'Copernican revolution'

When, at the outset, Hamlet announces cryptically to the Court that he is 'too much in the sun' (I. ii. 67), he is, according to Harold Jenkins, delivering a punning blow against his uncle. As the emblem of royalty, the sun connotes King Claudius, whose presence Hamlet finds stifling. As a pun, it connotes Prince Hamlet, whom Claudius wishes to make more his 'son' than he really is.⁶³ Yet as a response to his uncle's charge that the clouds of filial mourning 'still hang upon' him (I. ii. 66), Hamlet's wordplay says at least as much about his relationship to his dead father—the King he considers to be truly royal (I. ii. 191 and I. v. 44-5), and whom he will consistently align with the sun-god Hyperion (I. ii. 139-40 and III. iv. 56):

King: How is it that the clouds still hang upon you?

Hamlet: Not so, my lord, I am too much in the sun.

(I. ii. 66-7)

If we attend to this brief exchange, we hear what will be the inhibiting factor in Hamlet's revenge to be already in operation with regard to his grief. Dressed as he is in black, as if to

good mother,' he says, 'As kill a king and marry with his brother' (III. iv. 27-9).

soak up the sun, Hamlet is not the only figure at Court who still mourns his father: *he is the one for whom mourning has not even begun*. The blazing visage of his royal father remains too strong to be in the least obscured by the separative clouds of mourning. Even before he has properly witnessed the Ghost, Hamlet is already still too much in the presence of his not-quite-dead father; the latter is not sufficiently ‘gone’, not absent enough, for the processes of detachment to have got underway. Even, and especially, in death, his father remains the centre of Hamlet’s universe.

When the Ghost at last makes its appearance to Hamlet in order to call for vengeance, its imperative excludes that which his son most requires if he is to mourn and/or revenge at all: namely that he forget, and especially all the paradoxes which this carries as an imperative. It is the double-bind of remembering/forgetting (closing the/an eye(s)) that connects revenge with commemoration of the dead—each a duty of separation from the dead which maintains a link with them; a preservation of a link, by that duty, which facilitates separation. In order to tease out the profundity of this equation, however, it is necessary to make some further remarks on the cultural ‘work’ that early modern tragedy has, in some critical quarters, been understood to perform, and to place Hamlet’s peculiar predicament alongside the paternal loss suffered by his zealous counterpart in the text, the revenger Laertes.

It would not be difficult to relate the co-ordinates of modernity of which we earlier gave a very specific (‘Lacanian’) account to the general ‘change in the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities’ charted in Stephen Greenblatt’s seminal text on early-modern writing *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980 p. 1). Indeed, in a recent article on *Hamlet* and its place in post-Reformation culture

⁶³ See Jenkins’s notes to the Arden edition: I. ii. 67 LN. Cf I. ii. 106-8 and 117

Anthony Low (1999) describes the will to selfhood mapped by Greenblatt as an effect and a cause of that madness of Western reason (whose temporal specificity we are beginning to challenge)—the repudiation of paternity: ‘Before the modern autonomous individual can step forth in all his glory, he must first free himself [...] from the past, from tradition, from ancestral piety, and especially from the father and the paternal lineage’ (pp. 444-5). Such, he argues, is the project of Coriolanus who desires to ‘stand/As if a man were author of himself’ (*Coriolanus*. V. iii. 36-7). Yet within Shakespeare’s tragic paradigms, Low argues, the modern will to subjectivity remains a transgression, a madness or delusion which even the protagonists themselves cannot help but realise is no more than an ‘As if’:

The arc of the action reveals this gesture to be an act of hubris, for which [the hero] will be tragically punished. Yet we know that such acts of self-fashioning, although they begin as role-playing, can issue in authentic change, first in the individual, then in the culture.

(p. 445)⁶⁴

Low need not announce to what cultural change he is referring here, for he is already building on sociological and materialist accounts of the part played by tragedy in the cultural history immediately preceding the English Revolution. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the political dimension of the gesture of filiarchal liberation has been addressed by several authors who have recognised the relation of subordinate correspondence, inherent in early modern political theory, between the father who is a king

⁶⁴ For Low the imaginative possibility of autonomous self-hood, however restricted, was enabled by the Protestant imperative of forgetting the dead; and he identifies legible traces in *Hamlet* of the Protestant duty of amnesia. In particular he relates Claudius’s speech at court against Hamlet’s ‘obstinate condolment’ (I. ii. 87-106) to a sermon by Matthew Parker in 1551 which had warned that ‘it agreeth not with the rules of faith [...] for a christian man to bewayle the dead’ (Low 1999 p. 462). But in claiming that the new Protestant imperative is ‘the transformative event that led to [...] an] essential paradigm of modernity, a necessary adjunct to autonomous individualism, for which the brutally appropriate name is *killing the father*’ (p. 443) he perhaps fails to recognise that the imperative to forget is already inscribed within *Hamlet* as a paradox—and one whose consequences it thrives in dramatising.

in the family, and the king who is a father in the state.⁶⁵ Not least of all, Franco Moretti's study 'The Great Eclipse' (1988) connects the re-emergence of tragic drama in the sixteenth-century to the decline of a medieval order centred on God and the emergence of a subjectivity able to challenge and appropriate the authority of absolutism. The power of tragedy, for Moretti, lies in its recognition that since absolute sovereignty is by definition a power released from control, having its origin in itself, it also contains the possibility of its own usurpation and replication. Let us recall what was said in this connection regarding *Julius Caesar*. Within tragic drama the monarch occupies a deeply ambivalent position as both the prohibitor *and the model* of what Kierkegaard calls 'the individual left entirely to himself [...] his own creator' (cited in Moretti 1988 p. 45)—a subjectivity which we might identify in Laplanchean terms as ipsocentric. Tragedy takes the claim of absolute power at its word. Less than a century before the revolution, tragedy was paying the monarch 'an ambiguous homage', at once elaborating to the letter his self-determining power and, therefore, undermining his singular and superior legitimacy and so putting the possibility of self-determination up for grabs. It foreshadowed and rehearsed the delegitimation of the absolute monarch and the installation of the subject as sovereign. 'Tragedy', says Moretti provocatively, 'disentitled the absolute monarch to all rational and ethical legitimation. Having deconsecrated the king, tragedy made it possible to decapitate him' (p. 42). Belsey (1985) has further argued that this coincidence of the emergence of the sovereign subject with the repudiation of the paternal absolutism of the monarch achieves its supreme expression in revenge tragedy, where the motivation for the protagonist's action emerges from the monarch-figure's failure to administer justice, or, as in the case of *Hamlet*, his own transgression of the law. Belsey concedes that revenge is always represented 'in excess

⁶⁵ On this correspondence with regard to *Hamlet* see Barker (1984) p. 159.

of justice', as a bloody, hellish disobedience to Christian conscience (p. 116). But she claims that since the quest for vengeance is always inaugurated by the moral or judicial deficiency of the king, revenge nevertheless 'seems to the revenger (and to the audience?) an overriding imperative' (p. 116). The action of vengeance becomes a restraint on tyrannical power, a 'purging [of the] corrupt social body' which establishes the individual subject as an 'autonomous agent of retribution' (p. 116). The revolutionary gesture of modernity thus carries the symbolic force of parricide.

Considered as a politically charged adumbration and facilitation of regicide and the freeing of the subject *as* sovereign (*absolutum*), tragedy (or at least revenge tragedy) as such would seem to entail in its very structure the co-ordinates that Garber pursues in the exemplar of *Hamlet*. Yet with its Ghost, Shakespeare's text, or indeed revenge tragedy in general, surely presents us with a paradox. That the ghost of Old Hamlet occupies a position, however embellished and modernised, among a series of other revenge ghosts whose classical lineage is introduced into early modern drama by way of Seneca is beyond question and has been intelligently written about elsewhere.⁶⁶ But this heritage *qua* heritage anchors the radicalness of early modern dramatic vengeance in a code that is doubly traditional. The revenge ghost makes its posthumous demand as the individual blood ancestor of the protagonist and as the generic literary ancestor of the dramatist in whose fiction he is inscribed. Whether or not Hamlet defers, or rather is disabled from undertaking the violent task called for, the fact remains that the 'purgation' he must undertake is demanded by way of an injunction that is ancestral. If revenge drama performs the

⁶⁶ The two classic essays on this topic are by F.W. Moorman (1906a and 1906b).

historical 'task'⁶⁷ of opening up the space for practising the rehearsal of the revolutionary gesture of modernity, then it does so, nevertheless, in the name of the father.⁶⁸

Reading *Hamlet* is not a question of resolving this paradox, but rather of witnessing precisely how its operations are mobilised by the text and through the Ghost's immobilising injunction to his son. Nowhere does this become clearer than in relation to Laertes' revenge quest which emerges as a result of the mistaken murder of the 'Rat' Polonius, and Ophelia's madness.

'[B]y the image of my cause', Hamlet says to Horatio of Laertes, 'I see/The portraiture of his' (V. ii. 77-8); and so he does. During the Scenes in the wake of Polonius's death and upon Laertes' return from France, the text labours to evoke and sustain parallels between the nature of paternal loss which characterises the situation faced by Hamlet, and Laertes and Ophelia. What is stressed in particular, and notably by Claudius, is the familiar trope of a poisoning infraction. Ophelia's psychosis, Claudius diagnoses, 'springs/All from her father's death', and is a symptom of 'the poison of deep grief' (IV. v. 75-6).⁶⁹ Similarly, Laertes' return has, he says, been fuelled by

buzzers [who] infect his ear
With pestilent speeches of his father's death,
Wherein necessity, of matter beggar'd
Will nothing stick our person to arraign
In ear and ear.

(IV v 90-4)

⁶⁷ Moretti (1988) p. 42.

⁶⁸ The paradox should be pointed out that the first revenge ghost to make an appearance on the dramatic stage is that of Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (Eumenides 97ff.). As the ghost who calls upon the Erinnys for the vengeance of mother-right, Clytemnestra is at once the model and the detritus of the form of the revenge ghost: both the angry spectre who calls for blood and whose outline will become so familiar to the English stage, and a unique figure whose call to arms will be overruled in the Aeropagus in favour of the paternal rights of Agamemnon whose posthumous vengeance receives divine sanction.

⁶⁹ He remains of course ignorant of her frustrated love for Hamlet; though on this point see note 75 below.

The death of Polonius is thus figured as a traumatic poison and one which replicates and multiplies itself, spreading a pestilence throughout the ears of Denmark and beyond.

Certainly Claudius has his own interests at heart. It is *his* name that is being 'arraigned' in the 'general' ear. But his diagnoses do point to a more fundamental similitude between the character of his nephew's loss and that of Polonius's offspring. For what makes the death of Polonius so poisonous is that he did not make what Ophelia wishfully calls 'a good end' (IV. v. 183). Like Old Hamlet cut off in the blossoms of his sin,

Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd,
No reck'ning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head

(I. v. 77-9)

it is not just the truncation of Polonius's life, but in particular the truncated manner with which his passing has been marked that has so disturbed his filial survivors.⁷⁰ Claudius is at pains to point out regretfully that it is the 'hugger-mugger' character of Polonius's interment which Ophelia's sanity cannot bear and which has generated the gossip now inflaming the avenging rage of Laertes (IV. v. 83-94). Thus, the insistent theme of Ophelia's fragmentary songs and verbal meanderings is the issue of her father's commemoration and remembrance:

Ophelia: There's rosemary, that's for remembrance—
Pray you, love, remember. And there's pansies,
that's for thoughts.

Laertes: A document in madness: thoughts and
Remembrance fitted.

(IV. v. 173-7)

⁷⁰ On Hamlet's melancholia over his father's truncated mourning cf. I. ii. 137-59 and 176-81; II. ii. 55-7; III. ii. 124-133. On the failure of rites of passage and the revenger's melancholy more generally, see Sacks (1985) p. 85.

Similarly, when Laertes blusters his demand for recompense it is the maimed rites⁷¹ of his father's passage that engender a parenthetical proliferation of motives for revenge:

Let this be so.
His means of death, his obscure funeral—
No trophy, sword, or hatchment o'er his bones,
No noble rite, nor formal ostentation—
Cry to be heard, as t'were from heaven to earth,
That I must call't in question.

(IV. v. 209-13)

In light of these sexually differentiated responses to the abjection of improper mourning,⁷² it is tempting to re-affirm Michael Neill's point about the equivalence between revenge and remembrance. Cut off prematurely, both Polonius and Old Hamlet require intercession; yet, in accordance with the contemporary outlawing of commemorative ritual, they are impotent, save for the secular means of revenge.

But if Shakespeare's tragedy legibly bears the impact of the Protestant upheavals in commemorative practice, then the mirror image which it establishes between its two revengers, I suggest, amounts less to a 'fantasy response' to the resultant impotence of the living than to a critical exploration of its paradoxical limits.

The relation between Hamlet and his counterpart is ultimately asymmetrical. Laertes has no hesitation (at least hypothetically), where Hamlet does, of becoming a Pyrrhus and cutting the throat of his father's aggressor 'i'th'church' (IV. vii. 125). Believing Claudius to be responsible, Laertes makes his way to Denmark without delay. There is no second *Mousetrap*: in order to establish the veracity of the poisonous tales that have reached his ear, he simply demands the truth from the King (IV. v. 112ff):

King: Good Laertes,
If you desire to know the certainty

⁷¹ The same fate awaits Ophelia's corpse, of course: V. i. 211-231.

⁷² On Ophelia's insanity as against the male trajectory of active revenge, see Showalter (1985).

Of your dear father, is't writ in your revenge
That, swoopstake, you will draw both friend and foe,
Winner and loser?

Laertes: None but his enemies.

King: Will you know them then?

Laertes: To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms,
And, like the kind life-rend'ring pelican,
Repast them with my blood.

King: Why now you speak
Like a good child and a true gentleman.

(IV. v. 139-48)

The gory tenor of Aeneas' tale to Dido seems to come to Laertes naturally; and, not without good reason, it pleases Claudius. I suggest that the King's flattering response that Polonius's son speaks as both a good child and a true gentleman intimates precisely what is at stake in the differential alacrity with which he and Hamlet set about undertaking their equivalent tasks of violent, secular 'remembrance', and how that very asymmetry demands that rather than placing Shakespeare's tragedy back within what we have identified as the amnesiac/parricidal Oedipean paradigm of modernity, we read it as a radical and proleptic critique of that very posture.

In Act I, by the time we witness Hamlet dressed in black and unable to mourn his 'loss', we already know that his father, far from being absent, has been repeatedly making his spectral presence felt to the petrified guard of Elsinore castle. In the case of his rival, however, something quite different is apparent. Once Hamlet has lugged away Polonius's guts, we never hear from or see him again. The finality of his death is underscored by Hamlet who dwells upon the old man's decomposition:

King: Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

Hamlet: At supper.

King: At supper?

Hamlet: Not where he eats, but where a is eaten.

(IV. iii. 16-9)

Developing a conceit of digestion, wittily morbid as it may be, Hamlet proposes a significant corporeal alternative to the fate of his own father's spirit, suspended inert at the moment of death. Dead and gone to those he leaves behind, Polonius 'lives' on as both more and less than what he was: food for worms. His death, like death in general (IV. iii. 21-3), though with the exception of Old Hamlet's, is doubly *metabolic*. It literally alters him, makes him something else, namely food;⁷³ and that transformation in turn makes possible an endless cycle of further productions of change through the digestion and metabolisation of maggots:

Hamlet: Your fat king and your lean beggar is but
veritable service—two dishes, but to one table.
That's the end.

King: Alas, alas.

Hamlet: A man may fish with the worm that has eat of a
king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

King: What dost thou mean by this?

Hamlet: Nothing but to show you how a king may go a
progress through the guts of a beggar.

(IV. iii. 27-31)

If death is figured as the grim leveller which reduces the king and the beggar to the same state, that is and is not 'the end' as Hamlet pointedly calls it: for he continues nevertheless to recount the further progress of the dead. In decomposing, Polonius's body will be interminably recomposed: digested by a worm that is digested by a fish that is digested by a man whose fate is to be digested by worms. 'The end' is a beginning; decomposition is the process of recomposition, and vice versa.

While much will be made by his children of their father's memory, there is never a mention of Polonius's spiritual *return*.⁷⁴ Instead, in IV. v. there is a conspicuous insistence

⁷³ *Metaballô*: lit. to undergo a change, to alter.

⁷⁴ The possibility of his spiritual *survival* in heaven or hell is joked about by Hamlet (IV. iii. 33-5); though this is an entirely different matter from his return in the manner of Old Hamlet's ghost. Note that while no

upon the irrevocable absence of the decomposed body of Laertes' father. The good child's first demand when Claudius gives him audience is 'Give me my father' (IV. v. 116). It is soon followed up by Ophelia's melancholically repetitious dirges:

*And will a not come again?
And will a not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again.*

*His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan.
God a mercy on his soul.*

(IV. v. 187-96)⁷⁵

Shakespeare thus announces the crucial difference in relation to the genesis of Hamlet's will to revenge, when Laertes says of the picture of his sister's madness: 'Hadst thou thy wits and didst persuade revenge,/It could not move thus' (IV. v. 167-8). For is it not the very character of the revenge ghost to preserve his wits and verbally persuade his survivor to posthumous violence in his name? What makes the difference between Hamlet and Laertes as revengers is the Ghost. Bodies decompose, alter, are metabolised: such is the fate of Polonius and King Hamlet; both may go a progress through a beggar's guts. Yet in the case of Hamlet's father, the old King is not (decomposing/recomposing) *with* the body. His ghost remains suspended, unchanging. Hamlet, he who cannot mourn, it seems, cannot revenge because of the continuing and overdetermined 'presence' of his father; Laertes

mention is made of Purgatory. Worms was the site of the 'Diet' of 1521 at which Luther defended his doctrine.

⁷⁵ That the lost object of certain of Ophelia's words elsewhere in this scene remains undecidable between Polonius and Hamlet only re-enforces, in the light of Hamlet's imminent return from England, the permanence of her father's absence. See e.g. lines IV. v. 161-3 and n.

claims to be more easily moved to vengeance in the very absence of the generic ghostly demand.

This peculiar circumstance, I suggest, has a certain basis in the parallel scenes of parental inscription in Act I. We have already discussed at length the mnemonic writing which the Ghost's message performs on the tablets of Hamlet's brain. But by the time of the re-appearance of the Ghost we have already witnessed Polonius, earlier the same day, deliver his notorious 'few precepts' to Laertes (I. iii. 58 and ff.). Urging his son to remember them, he invokes the metaphor of writing:

There, my blessing with thee,
And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character.

(I. iii. 57-9)

Whatever the virtue or otherwise of their content, Polonius's axioms are delivered in order to assert his authority as father. Yet he concludes with what seems to be a gesture not towards Laertes' subjection, but his liberation:

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell, my blessing season this in thee.

(I. iii. 78-81)

A striking conclusion, at once Ptolemaic and thoroughly Copernican, in Laplanche's understanding of these terms. For it is difficult not to hear in the old man's words an advocacy of what has been construed as the ipsocentric posture of the modern subject. The dictum 'to thine own self be true', at this moment of valediction, ostensibly points to the possibility of Laertes' autonomy—to the consistency of his 'own self' in the imminent absence of his father: above all—as well as and/or in spite of what I have just urged—ultimately it must be to yourself, not to your father, whom you must be true. The posture of

filial amnesia would appear to pertain first and foremost in *Hamlet* to Laertes. Polonius's imperative certainly sounds quite different from Old Hamlet's performatively poisoning demand that his son 'Remember'. Indeed it sounds rather more like the enabling double-bind of the dead Player King's speech to his wife: 'To thine own self be true': You may forget me so long as you be yourself—your 'own self'. Indeed, be yourself and forget me, for that is the best way to remember me (who am urging you to forget). Laertes cannot be a true gentleman, as Laertes calls him, without being a good son, and vice versa.

We can say, in fact, that Laertes' reception of the maxim means that long before he has been made edible guts, Polonius is already more dead than Old Hamlet. In order to explain this, let us invoke a comparative situation in the domain of metapsychology described by Dominique Scarfone (1994). Following Laplanche, Scarfone suggests that intromission—the implantation of an unmetabolisable foreign body—has a role to play in the formation of the superego in general. For Laplanche, the superego, which is made up of parental messages, gives rise to categorical imperatives that 'cannot be diluted, and cannot be replaced by anything else' (Laplanche 1987a p. 139). Now Scarfone goes on to elaborate two possible kinds of superego relating to the differing positions assumed by the message-sending parental other towards the subject: the hollowed-out superego (*surmoi en creux*) and the filled-in superego (*surmoi en plein*). The latter concerns what happens in psychosis, the former is what happens in other cases. In the 'non-pathological' situation 'the translatory function of the adult carries for the child the prohibitions of the surrounding culture' (Scarfone 1994 p. 105);⁷⁶ but what is more, those messages in turn invite a degree of translation by the receiving subject. What Scarfone calls 'blanks in the parental

⁷⁶ I cite from Fletcher's unpublished translation of Scarfone's paper. Page numbers refer to the French original.

discourse' require 'the child as translator to make for himself a morality in relation to which he keeps a certain freedom of manoeuvre' (p. 105). In the other case, there are no blanks, no enigmas, there is no translation/repression on the side of the adult who sends the message; only 'a constraining [and] invading presence' which blocks translation and 'takes over' entirely the subject's attempts at any undertaking; is a centre, *the* centre, of his psychical universe (p. 105). I do not wish to map Scarfone's distinction in any schematic or pathologising way onto Laertes' and Hamlet's respective and contrasting scenes of parental inscription. But I do suggest that it offers a productive way of conceptualising the consequences of their difference. Scarfone writes of a psychotic patient of his who said "“We live [...] according to the definitions others have of us”". 'The other that defined him,' Scarfone glosses, 'prevented him from translating, from betraying or misrepresenting. He cannot betray that other [...] by fashioning [for] himself a private version of his life. The other is in him but cannot be metabolised' (p. 106). With the body of his father decomposing in the grave, Hamlet is nonetheless constrained by the indigestible message of his resolutely unchanging spirit into repetition and sameness: to remain too much in the sun. Revenge in the name of his father is only possible at the cost of a partial betrayal of the singular command that he 'remember' and 'not forget'. In Polonius's dictum we have a kind of 'hollowed-out' imperative: a separative command that Laertes live by his own command. The permanence of the inscription is assured precisely and only by Polonius's 'absence'. Laertes *obeys*, and preserves 'undiluted' the parental other in fashioning himself. It is *in* his not (just) being his father that the will of his father is carried out. In a figurative way, and at his own demand, Polonius has already begun decomposing/recomposing well

before his corporeal death; remembered in being forgotten and forgotten in being remembered.

In this connection, we must recognise that Polonius's dictum represents a strong signal of *Hamlet's* refusal to fit an interpretative frame based on an (Oedipean) notion of filiarchal revolution and the installation of an ipsocentric, sovereign subject. *The throwing-off of the father is already situated at the level of the father's desire; and it is, moreover, in that very throwing-off that his law is preserved.* The possibility of Oedipean revolution is compromised in advance because it is already called forth by the father.

I suggest that we attempt to understand this in two complementary ways: one remains what might be described as metapsychological; the other, political.

As regards the first, Laplanche suggests that the superego, insofar as it is in part constituted by intromission, forms a kind of 'psychotic enclave': an internal-alien voice of law which demands compliance. But let us take a certain liberty with Laplanche's formulation. In non-pathological cases the unmetabolisable parental imperative would, like Polonius's, have to include the demand that the child 'find out for himself'. A self-perpetuating negativity, then; a double-bind, which calls not for simple repetitious compliance ('do exactly as your father does and nothing but'), but assures compliance through difference, transgression. The law of writ must confer an enabling liberty. Its permanence is the absence of the parental other. On the other hand, the pathological formation, which resonates with the situation faced by Hamlet, is caused by an excessive presence: the parental other is too much 'remembered', too much...alive. Might we not say, then, that the madness—the psychosis—which modernity claims to be its own is an internal necessity of the structure of paternal transmission which it wishes to throw off? Must not

the absenting, the forgetting, the *death* of the father be internal to the demand of the father if he is to have any legacy at all? Must not a kind of 'parricide' always have been, in the first place, the desire of the father, the enabling negativity implanted in the non-pathological superego?

In order to develop this suggestion on a political register, let us note by way of something more than a comparison, that in his tract on modern man and the rejection of History, Nietzsche produces an echo of Polonius as he calls upon 'Youth' to reach the target of Life:

And how can we attain our goal? you will ask. At the beginning of a journey towards that goal, the god of Delphi cries to you in his oracle: 'Know yourself' [...] [Each one of us] must organise the chaos within him by thinking back to his real needs.

(Nietzsche 1874 pp. 122-3)

It may appear extraordinary that Nietzsche should find himself recalling, of all people, the elderly retainer to the King, Polonius. But perhaps it is rather that Shakespeare's text perceives and anticipates the paradox of the Nietzschean affirmation of Life *qua* 'imperative', and in particular an imperative addressed to Youth. Once the annihilation of historical anteriority is identified as the grounds for the modern condition, its advocacy to the succeeding generation can only itself become a historical gesture. As de Man puts it, in connection with this Nietzschean aporia: 'modernity cannot assert itself without being at once swallowed up and reintegrated into a regressive historical process' (de Man 1969 p. 151). The imperative structure of the maxim 'Know yourself', no less than Polonius's 'to thine own self be true', defeats its ostensible object in advance, and the rhetoric of autonomous selfhood becomes engulfed by the condition of its generational transmission. The difference between Nietzsche's text and Shakespeare's is that the latter wears this

paradox on its sleeve: the imperative of modernity is already placed firmly in the mouth of the eldest and most thoroughly traditional of fathers.

We are suggesting, then, not simply that Shakespeare's tragedy reads modernity in terms of an inevitable falling back into the mode of the traditional; but, what is more, that it shows the traditional to be already marked by the aporia of modernity (which, in Nietzsche's case, modernity itself disavows). The requirement that he be 'forgotten' must already be structural to the position of the father, must always already have been so, if tradition is to be tradition and not pure, un-reshaped, repetition. The pathologically 'normal' son, or the prince who comfortably succeeds his father to the throne will always have been enmeshed in a paternal double-bind. Reshaping is internal to the possibility of legacy and tradition; and revolutionary reshaping cannot but turn out to be a traditional gesture, a repetition and an affirmation of difference: a repetition in being an affirmation of difference. Notice that when Laertes returns from France with his vengeful rabble there is no question that he intends a full-blown revolution. It is as if, a frightened Messenger warns Claudius, 'the world were now but to begin,/Antiquity forgot, custom not known' (IV. v. 103-4). Yet, the rabble calls him 'lord': 'They cry "Choose we! Laertes shall be King [...]' Laertes shall be king, Laertes king' (IV. v. 106-8). The new *beginning* which Laertes heralds is only a *new* beginning. In killing the King he will himself succeed the King, enforce and perpetuate the 'custom' of a paternity of state which the revolutionaries claim no longer to know. With whatever force the revolution will be carried out, it cannot not constitute a succession.

This is not to deny the event of revolution as such, nor what Low calls the possibilities of 'genuine change' which it consolidates and brings about. The point is that

Shakespeare's text recognises that the supposed gesture of autonomous filiarchal revolution—be it conceived in terms of forgetting, foreclosure, parricide, regicide—is never radical, because none of these things is not already structural to tradition. 'The king is dead. Long live the king!' The death of the king makes necessary the transmission of his legacy; symmetrically, transmission itself requires his death. Hence the uncharacteristically grotesque words of the ever-allegiant Guildenstern to Claudius:

Most holy and religious fear it is
To keep those many many bodies safe
That live and feed upon your Majesty.

(III. iii. 8-10)

As well as the banal sense that the family of his subjects draws sustenance from the father of the state, Guildenstern's weird image figures a more perceptive vision of the normal macrocosmic family of the kingdom. Like Hamlet's worms, the family is sustained through death, it feeds off the death of the father, maintains itself through, and 'lives' on the basis of, his death. Tradition is already enabled by the gesture of revolution.

If Hamlet is constrained by his father's inscription to remain too much in the sun, then let us hear all the valencies that this heliocentric trope of blockage connotes. Ever dominated by his Hyperion-like father (too much *in* the sun), Hamlet remains caught in a peculiar filial relation (too much...the *son*). Yet in being his father's son and nothing but—in carrying out to the letter the imperative to remember—he becomes himself too much the *sun*, too much a repetition, a performative re-embodiment, of his ghostly father, and just as impotent as is his father to exact his revenge. The 'better' a son, and only a son, he is, the more the sun he must be—and therefore unable to take up the legacy of his Hyperion. Thus, not radical difference, but non-difference confounds legacy. 'Long live the king' are the words with which Barnardo 'unfolds' himself. The absence of the preface that 'the king is

dead', is telling; less as a signal that Denmark has begun to forget King Hamlet's passing, than because that king remains too much alive.

*Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love.*

(II. ii. 115-8)

As Garber points out, the punning complexities of 'doubt' in Hamlet's poem to Ophelia put in question the very process of putting something in question. The word seems to shift from meaning 'dispute' or 'challenge' to 'suspect' or 'fear' (Garber 1987 p. 132); but the play of its connotations cannot be halted in such a way as to secure any of the ostensible certainties which Ophelia is invited to 'doubt'—the better to affirm the super-certainty of his love—as delimitable certainties at all. If we understand Ophelia to be invited straightforwardly to 'doubt' that the sun moves, the poem would seem to suppose the certainty of the Ptolemaic system which claims that it does. If, on the other hand, she is to 'suspect' that the sun moves, then the certainty which is presupposed and questioned is the Copernican claim that it does not.⁷⁷

What Hamlet may not realise⁷⁸—just as he does not realise that the key to his revenge is presented in his own staging of *The Mousetrap*—is that the poem is thus less about hypothetical doubts of specific certainties than the absence of certainty as such, the absence of a centre;⁷⁹ and it is no coincidence that the centrality of the sun is invoked only to be left undecidable.

⁷⁷ The same inevitably goes for the claim that the stars are fire. Both this and the movement of the sun were questioned by Renaissance science. See Garber (1987) p. 132.

⁷⁸ Cf. Jenkins's Arden note: II. ii. 116 n.

⁷⁹ Cf. Laplanche (1999A [1992f] p. 56: 'the Copernican revolution, to some extent, opened up the possibility of the absence of a centre. In a world of quasi-infinite distances it becomes absurd to persist in trying to preserve one star among others—the sun or solar system—as centre.'

That, as Jenkins points out, 'the sun' of Hamlet's words at Court contains a reference to Claudius is a telling symptom of the stakes of Hamlet's revenge task. Following the sermon against excessive grief to which the King subjects him before the Court, Hamlet privately valorises his father, labouring to extricate his uncle from the former's sun-like glory:

That it should come to this!
But two months dead—nay, not so much, not two—
So excellent a king that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
Must I remember?

(I. ii. 137-43)

This classical polarisation of the two father-kings has elsewhere been read in Oedipal terms as the transformation of ambivalent filial wishes into 'good' and 'bad' fathers:⁸⁰ the pure and blazing paternal ideal, and the incestuous satyr-like beast. It is somewhat more complex, however. The attribute with which Hamlet wishes to define his incestuous uncle is in fact what characterises Hyperion: the sun-god married his own sister, Theia.⁸¹ Certainly the son's idealisation of Old Hamlet is shown here to be no more than an idealisation. He is not 'unfallen'; so much is clear. More significant is that if both Claudius and Old Hamlet can be identified in Hyperion, the distinction between the murdered father and the father-substitute to be murdered begins to blur. The murder of Claudius *is* the murder of the father. Not—or at least, not only—in the sense that regicide carries the symbolic force of parricide (the murder of the father of the kingdom). But because the

⁸⁰ See Ernest Jones (1949) p. 122.

⁸¹ It is no coincidence that the parents of the couple Ouranos and Gaia ('Heaven and earth') are invoked, perhaps unwittingly, immediately after the comparison is made.

precondition as well as the consequence of Hamlet's taking any vengeance for his father is the elimination of his father's ghost.

The double reference of the sun/Hyperion to Claudius as well as Old Hamlet, means that killing the King would not be a simply Ptolemaic gesture, a displacement of the sovereign sun (the king) by the son (the subject), who thereby becomes his own centre. It would be as Copernican as it is Ptolemaic; which is to say that, like the poem, it would surpass the notion of a centre altogether. The moment the royal sun (Claudius) is overthrown is the moment that the desire of the other sun (the father) is satisfied. Thus the supposed moment of liberation would be one of subjection: in killing the royal sun Hamlet would become the 'good son'. *At the same time*, in order for Hamlet to be the 'son' (the avenger of his father), he must cease to be the sun (the repetition of his father): he must, in other words, take liberties with his father's law of writ. Thus, inversely, his ostensible subjection (acting upon the word of his father), would also be his liberation, an overthrow of the blazing centrality of his father (such that Hamlet no longer simply acts him out), which nevertheless is done in remembrance of him.

Hamlet's aberrant situation is a kind of pathologised or exoskeletal one which shows revenge in general to be neither reactionary nor revolutionary as such, but the meeting point of the co-dependency of these modes. The revenger kills the sovereign at the behest of the other, which means that he cannot be 'true to himself' (the Oedipean or Ptolemaic posture which supposedly arises from regicide) without being true to the other; and that he cannot be true to the other, unless he is true to himself (and not the other's

simple repetition). The revenger would not thus recentre sovereign power in the subject, but decentre subjectivity altogether.⁸²

Ending

In drawing towards a conclusion—and towards the possibility of *Hamlet's* conclusion—I would emphasise that Hamlet will never *set about* killing Claudius. He will never plan the King's death, never orchestrate and direct it as do generic revengers like Kyd's Hieronimo, or Shakespeare's own Titus. In an inversion of the more usual scheme of things, the killing of the King happens—just *happens*—within a scene that is thoroughly orchestrated by the one upon whom vengeance should be taken, and which, like everything else in Hamlet's tragic itinerary, is governed in advance by the intromission of poison: namely, the duel between the two rivalrous sons.

In what always appears to be yet another repetition of the repetitious 'primal' crime,⁸³ let us suggest that, with the murder of Claudius which emerges from the ill-fated duel, the text shows a displacement to have occurred that is fully in accordance with the necessary movement of decentring which we have attempted to outline above.

It is to be noted that having absorbed the poison from Laertes' foil, and having—at last—poisoned Claudius, Hamlet begins to look, and now perhaps more than ever, like a re-embodiment of the Ghost. In having killed for his father, he explicitly assumes in relation to Horatio his own father's earlier place in relation to him:

I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu.
You that look pale and tremble at this chance,

⁸² The recentring which would seem to occur were Laertes to kill Claudius and become king, would be compromised in advance by its *process*: the Ptolemaic dream of 'the individual left entirely to himself [...] his own creator' is one conferred upon him already by the self-negating demand of his father—the father who, precisely in killing the king and assuming his paternal title in Denmark, Laertes further negates and thereby preserves the better.

⁸³ Indeed, Hamlet refers to them as 'brother[s]' (V. ii. 239).

remainder, and, significantly, *at Hamlet's deathly insistence*. Certainly, in his response to Horatio, we again hear a ghost of the Ghost: 'If ever thou didst hold me in thy heart' ('If ever thou didst thy dear father love [...]'). But if Hamlet addresses Horatio just as the Ghost had once addressed Hamlet himself, it is precisely, and paradoxically, in order not (just) to repeat his father that he does repeat him: *he speaks 'posthumously' in order to halt the threat of Claudius's distilment being transmitted further*. At the risk of repeating *ourselves*, let us re-affirm that so long as Hamlet is only the sun (the simple repetition of his father) he perpetuates, as we have seen, the 'primal', poisoning infraction first transmitted to Old Hamlet. In having now become the ('good') son (in having fulfilled his father's demand), his own echoing and quasi-posthumous demand (that *his* cause be set aright) is one in which Hamlet is positioned neither as a figure of autonomous filiarchal liberty nor abject filial subjection alone. After the death of the King it is no longer a question of statically repeating, and of thus merely perpetuating, the poisonous message of his father. The son and no longer the sun, he displaces the father's posthumous message in repeating it; repeats it in the very act of displacing it.

Just as the material introduction of poison into Old Hamlet's ear earlier defined the violence of his message to his son, so too Hamlet's intervention to stop Horatio's ingestion of Claudius's poison has its correspondence in the very character of Hamlet's posthumous message to his still-living addressee. Some commentators have protested that when Horatio does preface Hamlet's 'story' to Fortinbras and the English Ambassadors, his version of things seems inadequate to the complexity of the events which the audience in the theatre have just witnessed onstage:

And let me speak to th'yet unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear

Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,
 Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
 Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,
 And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
 Fall'n on th'inventors' heads. All this can I
 Truly deliver.

(V. ii. 384-91)

Anne Barton (1980), in particular, has argued that Horatio's version of things 'leave[s] out everything that seems important, reducing all that is distinctive about this play to a plot stereotype' (p. 52). But according to the logic of the play itself, is not this very inadequacy a condition of possibility for Hamlet's tragedy being *told* by Horatio at all (and not perpetuated)? There is nothing in Horatio's brief adieu to Hamlet, after he makes his last request, which would compare with Hamlet's own over-receptiveness before the Ghost:

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
 And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

(V. ii. 364-5)

It is an adieu, and that is all. There is no mnemonic inscription in the book and volume of Horatio's brain, for there is no poisonous constraint in Hamlet's last words. If the Ghost's message in Act I had been notable for its poisonous and traumatising excess (even and especially as it failed and did not fail to 'unfold' the secrets of its originator's prison-house), Hamlet's last words in Act V (even and especially as they recall those of his father) are thoroughly enigmatic and, to employ Scarfone's term, *en creux*. 'The rest is silence' (V. ii. 363): in a marked contrast with the climactic imperative of the Ghost's long speeches ('Remember me'), Hamlet departs with a statement that acknowledges a space of non-disclosure, of that which will never be remembered beyond his life. Horatio's subsequent preface may well 'overlook' or 'wink at' all that is distinctive in the drama that has just passed, but that is exactly the point: Hamlet's very tragedy has consisted in nothing less

than a prolonged over-adherence to the demand of the dead—one in which, we have seen, the gesture of ‘overlooking’ the dead is shown to be structural to the possibility of their attaining any ‘rest’ whatsoever.

Is it not, moreover, thoroughly fitting that *Hamlet* should end on this note which Barton finds reductive and banally generic? That this text which affirms itself in its difference from its generic precursors—a difference which comes about precisely in its hero’s prolonged incapacity to differentiate himself productively from his own familial antecedent—should be reduced by Horatio to a ‘plot stereotype’ at the behest of a Hamlet who has finally accomplished the long-deferred deed? Only one ‘Hamlet’, we have suggested, can be relieved from becoming the repetitious ghost of his/its ancestor. We should not, therefore, be surprised that once Hamlet does cease in being no more than the repetition of his father, the ‘distinctiveness’ of Shakespeare’s text becomes submerged in its turn, reduced—with the attainment of vengeance—to a repetition of the generic models of filial violence from which it has, for so long, laboured to differ.

* * *

We have come a long way from Freud’s Oedipal reading of *Hamlet*. As with our previous two tragedies, in this text it is, first and foremost, in the bearing of the occupier of the paternal place towards the son/subject that the specificity of the tragedy consists. And equally, the priority of that paternal other’s message is what governs the son/subject’s orientation: even and especially his orientation towards a ‘self’. Such is the paradox which Laplanche’s return to Freud discovers as the movement of ontogenesis in general.

If we have moved away from Freud's explicit reading of the play, however, we have nonetheless attempted to remain 'with' him, and with the possibilities contained in the funeral dream which Garber links with Freud's identificatory relation to the bereaved Dane. What has concerned us is not Oedipal sexuality, but the function of the role of the other at the very limit of the category of otherness: the message of the dead. Freud's dream, I would suggest in closing—whatever its biographical relation to the abandonment of seduction may or may not be—provides one persisting, minor trace, among many in the Freudian corpus, of the radicality of his early discoveries which was never fully exorcised, even after 1897. Like the speech of the Player King and, finally, Hamlet's speech to Horatio, it articulates an alien voice which persists even after the annihilation of its bearer: an alterity and an enigmatic message which continues to haunt and inhabit its addressee in the very absence of its original sender.

Conclusion

By way of a conclusion I wish merely to restate the central themes and arguments which I have tried to present, and to suggest, on the basis of their overall implications, what I consider to be the significance of this thesis for the study of psychoanalytic theory and its relation to cultural production.

A restatement first:

1) I began by arguing that Freud's appeal to tragic drama appears on the very cusp of a general, tectonic shift in his thought, which is inaugurated by the official abandonment of the seduction theory in September 1897. On the basis of Laplanche's return to Freud—its conclusions as well as its systematic methodology—it was maintained that the Freudian approach to the privileged domain of tragic drama can and must be rethought in relation to some of Freud's earliest and most radical discoveries: even, and especially given that the development of his thought seeks to occlude them.

2) It was seen that the Ptolemaic drift of Freud's enterprise operates within the coordinates of the Oedipean posture which has been assumed by Western philosophy. This, in such a way as to blind Freud towards the challenge posed by Sophocles' tragedy to the deprojective reasoning of its central protagonist. The very specificity of *Oedipus Tyrannus* was shown to consist not in its presentation of the triumphant riddle-solver with whom Freud identifies in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but of one confronted—and first of all in relation to his father—by a constitutive and insoluble enigma. The Oedipal

crimes of parricide and incest were thus shown to be secondary to a more fundamental (and double) intervention from the outside.

3) Chapter two took up a moment from one of Freud's elaborations of a foundational event in the genesis of the human psyche: the murder of the primal tyrant. Suggesting that this elaboration excluded from it any concession to complexity and self-alterity on the part of the primal father, the chapter sought to explore *Julius Caesar* and its dramatisation of an historical 'event'. It was argued that the prematurity of the (dramatised/repeated) deed of murder rendered it intrinsically plural, and in such a way as to necessitate the mechanism which Freud describes as 'deferred action' (*Nachträglichkeit*). *Julius Caesar* was thus positioned as a text which threatens the pure materiality which marks Freud's account of the primal deed, since it articulates a certain otherness (both of the 'tyrant' to himself, and thus of the deed to itself) which the logic of Ptolemaism seeks to exorcise.

4) The final Chapter was an attempt to shift away from the tendency of Freud, and criticism more generally, to repeat in the interpretative approach to *Hamlet* the very repudiation which has been perceived to be at the heart of Hamlet's prolonged delay: namely the repudiation of the dead father's message. By way of critiquing traditional psychoanalytically-conceived mechanisms of repudiation ('foreclosure'), the chapter set forth a reading of Hamlet's relation to his father and his father's message which was governed not by Hamlet's failure to internalise the call for revenge, but by his abject and paralysing domination by that overdetermined demand. Suggesting that Hamlet's paralysis in relation to his familial paternity is the motor of *Hamlet's* status as a recomposition and metabolisation of its generic forebears, it was shown that the

attainment of revenge renders the revenge-hero neither an autonomous filiarch nor a subject wholly eclipsed by the other, but one whose subjecthood is paradoxically achieved only in relation to an alterity which never ceases to inhabit him.

For each of the three tragedies I have sought to advance beyond a merely Oedipal reading, which means (especially with regard to *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*) that I have sought to advance beyond Freud's own readings of them. This does not, of course, imply a rejection of the validity of the Oedipal framework within psychoanalysis, or within the domain of literary interpretation. Nor does it imply a rejection of Freud's own interpretative approaches to these tragedies. Rather, I have taken the privileged motif of parricide as the index within them of a relation whose significance is at once more radical and less well debated within both psychoanalysis and literary studies: viz. the subject's fundamental and constitutive relation to the other.

We have consistently seen the emergence in or in relation to these three tragedies of the Delphic imperative (Know Thyself), which appears at such a crucial moment in Freud's discussion of his 'Copernican' discovery. In each case we have attempted to bear witness to the appearance of this 'self' as an effect of an alterity which makes it thoroughly inadequate. This procedure, let us insist, is not one which is motivated by a desire to demonstrate that Freud 'got it wrong'. On the contrary, we have attempted to take seriously Laplanche's charge regarding the necessary connivance of Freud's thought with its object, and thus to articulate in the name of Freud's earliest and most radical discoveries ('with Freud', therefore) as much as possible of what, in the tragedies, Freud's own path inevitably leads him to circumvent.

In the broadest sense, this thesis has maintained the need to question the ‘self’—the identity—of the Freudian enterprise. Again, not in order to repudiate its claims, but so as to attempt to understand better the cultural messages by which Freud himself was interpellated, and in relation to which psychoanalysis, implicitly as well as explicitly, has established it-self and continued to shore up its theoretical apparatus in endeavouring to translate. It is precisely what, in these cultural ‘foreign bodies’, has remained untranslated, unintegrated that has preoccupied us.

The relationship between psychoanalysis and tragedy—or indeed psychoanalysis and literature and cultural production in general—is one that cannot be sustained by the interpretative domination of the former over the latter. Nor can it just be conjured away on the assumption of a fundamental disjunction or diremption between them. Both of these positions scotomise the constitutive role which cultural production plays in the very foundation and formation of psychoanalysis: a fact which by definition makes the demand for further, patient *mutual* analyses. Between the familiar questions of ‘what can psychoanalysis say about this or that cultural work?’, and ‘how has psychoanalysis misconstrued and misrepresented this one?’, a third, imperative question must be posed: ‘what has this or that cultural work—what has cultural production in general—brought, in the first instance, *to* psychoanalysis?’

The present thesis is the first full-length study of literary texts to have drawn, in a sustained and consistent way, on the thought of Jean Laplanche. It is intended as an attempt to begin, at least, to respond to the urgency of this third question from within a theoretical framework where the unassimilated, the unintegrated are perceived as the sites of an alterity which demands neither exclusion, nor domestication, but productive

comprehension and development. The urgency of pursuing all that remains unassimilated in the Freudian enterprise, as well as the vastness of such an undertaking, should not be underestimated.

Appendix

(From Freud (1985 [1887-1904]) pp. 264-6)¹

September 21, 1897

Dear Wilhelm,

Here I am again, since yesterday morning, refreshed, cheerful, impoverished, at present without work, and having settled in again, I am writing to you first.

And now I want to confide in you immediately the great secret that has been slowly dawning on me in the last few months. I no longer believe in my *neurotica* [theory of the neurosis]. This is probably not intelligible without an explanation; after all, you yourself found credible what I was able to tell you. So I will begin historically [and tell you] where the reasons for disbelief came from. The continual disappointment in my efforts to bring a single analysis to a real conclusion; the running away of people who for a period of time had been most gripped [by analysis]; the absence of the complete successes on which I had counted; the possibility of explaining to myself the partial successes in other ways, in the usual fashion—this was the first group. Then the surprise that in all cases the *father*, not excluding my own, had to be accused of being perverse—the realization of the unexpected frequency of hysteria, with precisely the same conditions prevailing in each, whereas surely such widespread perversions against children are not very probable. The [incidence] of perversion would have to be immeasurably more frequent than the [resulting] hysteria

because the illness, after all, occurs only where there has been an accumulation of events and there is a contributory factor that weakens the defense. Then, third, the certain insight that there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathected with affect. (Accordingly, there would remain the solution that the sexual fantasy invariably seizes upon the theme of the parents). Fourth, the consideration that in the most deep-reaching psychosis the unconscious memory does not break through, so that the secret of childhood experiences is not disclosed even in the most confused delirium. If one thus sees that the unconscious never overcomes the resistance of the conscious, the expectation that in the treatment the opposite is bound to happen, to the point where the unconscious is completely tamed by the conscious, also diminishes.

I was so far influenced [by this] that I was ready to give up two things: the complete resolution of a neurosis and the uncertain knowledge of its etiology in childhood. Now I have no idea where I stand because I have not succeeded in gaining a theoretical understanding of repression and its interplay of forces. It seems once again arguable that only later experiences give the impetus to fantasies, which [then] hark back to childhood, and with this the factor of heredity regains a sphere of influence from which I had made it my task to dislodge it—in the interest of illuminating neurosis.

If I were depressed, confused, exhausted, such doubts would surely have to be interpreted as signs of weakness. Since I am in the opposite state, I must recognize them as the result of honest and vigorous intellectual work and must be proud that after going so deep I am still capable of such criticism. Can it be that this doubt merely represents an episode in the advance toward further insight?

¹ All interpolations in square brackets are by the translator of the correspondence.

It is strange too that no feeling of shame appeared—for which, after all, there could well be occasion. Of course I shall not tell it in Dan or speak it in Askelon, in the land of the Philistines, but in your eyes and my own, I have more the feeling of a victory than a defeat (which is surely not right).

How nice that your letter has arrived just now! It induces me to advance a proposal with which I had intended to close. If during this lazy period I were to go to the Northwest Station on Saturday evening, I could be with you at noon on Sunday and then travel back the next night. Can you clear that day for an idyll for the two of us, interrupted by an idyll for three and three and a half [of us]? That is what I wanted to ask. Or do you have a dear guest in the house or something urgent to do elsewhere? Or, if I have to leave for home the same evening, which would then not be worthwhile, do the same conditions obtain if I go straight to the Northwest Station on Friday evening and stay with you one and a half days? I mean this week, of course.

Now to continue my letter. I vary Hamlet's saying, 'To be in readiness': to be cheerful is everything! I could indeed feel quite discontent. The expectation of eternal fame was so beautiful, as was that of certain wealth, complete independence, travels, and lifting the children above the severe worries that robbed me of my youth. Everything depended upon whether or not hysteria would come out right. Now I can once again remain quiet and modest, go on worrying and saving. A little story from my collection occurs to me: 'Rebecca, take of your gown, you are no longer a bride'. In spite of all this, I am in very good spirits and content that you feel a need to see me again similar to mine to see you.

There remains one small anxiety. What can I still understand of your matters? I am certainly incapable of critically evaluating them; I shall hardly be in a position to

comprehend them, and the doubt that then sets in is not the product of intellectual work, like my doubt about my own matters, but is the result of mental inadequacy. It is easier for you; you can survey everything I bring and criticize it vigorously.

I have to add one more thing. In this collapse of everything valuable, the psychological alone has remained untouched. The dream [book] stands entirely secure and my beginnings of the metapsychological work have only grown in my estimation. It is a pity that one cannot make a living, for instance, on dream interpretation.

Martha came back with me to Vienna. Minna and the children are staying in the country another week. They have all been exceedingly well.

My pupil, Dr Gattel, is something of a disappointment. Very gifted and clever, he must, nevertheless, owing to his own nervousness and several unfavourable character traits, be classified as unpalatable.

How all of you are and whatever else is happening between heaven and earth, I hope—anticipating your reply—to hear soon in person.

Cordially your

Sigm.

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[**Note:** in general, dates in parentheses refer to the original publication date of each text. There are, however, some exceptions and localised variations. Firstly: in the case of texts for which original publication dates do not strictly apply, or could be misleading (i.e. for ancient and Shakespearean texts) the date given in parenthesis refers only to the date of the particular edition or translation of the work that has been cited. Secondly: for Freud, in order to preserve a sense of a text's chronological position in his itinerary, I have added square brackets to indicate the date of a work's composition where it does not coincide with the date of publication. A similar procedure has been followed for Laplanche's corpus: square brackets contain the original date of publication/composition where it does not coincide with the English translation that has been cited.]

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